

ATLANTIC OCEAN

21385
11.7.59



PRAGUE

MUNICH

BERNE

LYONS

MONTE CARLO

MARSEILLES

DATE

*Ly. Nakh
back*

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

ALGIERS

TUNIS

BOU SAADA

TANGIER

ORAN

CASABLANCA

TRIPOLI

BENGHAZI

GARIAN



AFRICA

THE DREAM AND THE REALITY

FIRST VOLUME

BY

JIŘÍ HANZELKA AND MIROSLAV ZIKMUND



PRAGUE 1955

Title of the original Czech edition
„AFRIKA SNŮ A SKUTEČNOSTI“

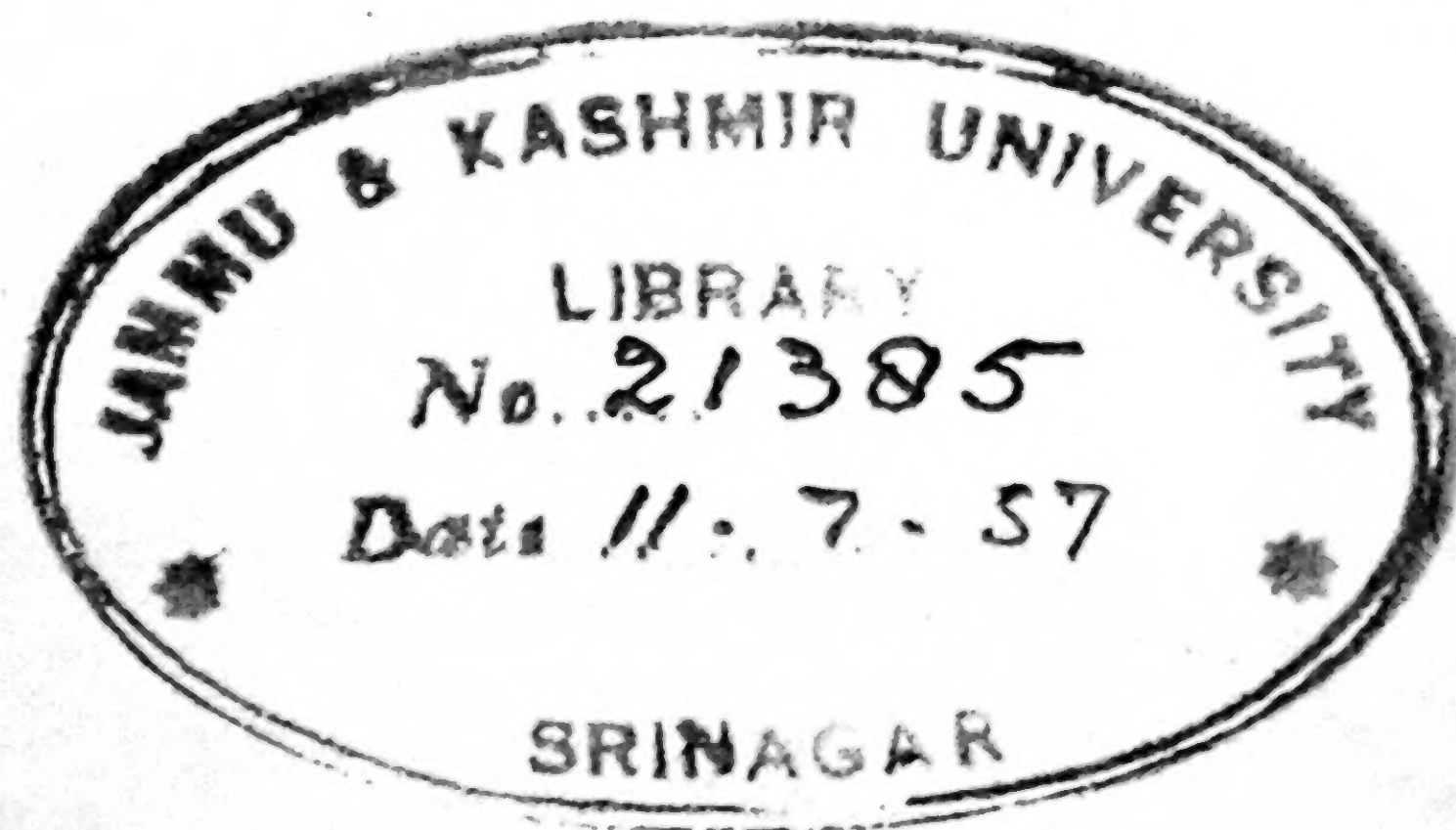
English translation by

IRIS URWIN

FILED BY

First Czech Edition	- - -	Sept. 1952	- -	50,000 copies
Second Czech Edition	- -	Nov. 1953	- -	50,000 copies
First German Edition	- -	Aug. 1954	- -	50,000 copies
First Austrian Edition	- -	Sept. 1954	- -	1,000 copies
Second Austrian Edition	-	Oct. 1954	- -	2,000 copies
First Hungarian Edition	-	Oct. 1954	- -	6,700 copies
Second Hungarian Edition		Nov. 1954	- -	10,000 copies
First Slovak Edition	- - -	Dec. 1954	- -	15,000 copies
Third Czech Edition	- - -	Dec. 1954	- -	50,000 copies
First English Edition	- - -	1955	- -	3,500 copies
Second German Edition	-	in print	- -	50,000 copies
Fourth Czech Edition	- -	in print	- -	50,000 copies

CHECKED



5782

MP4

FOR

First Edition

Copyright 1952 by Jiří Hanzelka and Miroslav Zikmund, Praha

Illustrations and graphic lay-out by František Přikryl

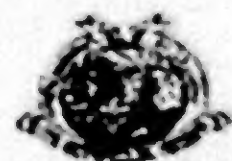
With 240 original photographs and 3 maps

Printed by Artia-Prague, Czechoslovakia

961

827

H 199 A. 1



ALLAMA IQBAL LIBRARY



21385

CONTENTS

- 1 - TO THE SHORES OF MOROCCO - - - - - 11
Germany and Switzerland from the road. Indo-Chinese in Avignon. Between Europe and Africa. Tangier overture. Casablanca — the white house. In the seat of the Foreign Legion. People of two worlds.
- 2 - THROUGH ALGERIA AND TUNISIA - - - - - 30
Above the abyss of Constantine. In the vineyards of Algeria. Celluloid Kasba. Water and desert. Bou Saada. The Arab world. Tunisia. Ruins of two thousand years ago. Tunisia and the French protectorate.
- 3 - A LAND BURNT BY SUN AND WAR - - - - - 46
The desert and the war. A change of masters. Flight from an overcrowded peninsula. A hundred and twenty degrees in the shade. Three days of murder and plunder. A mill-wheel without water. Twenty-four hours. A theatre for five thousand spectators on the edge of the desert.
- 4 - BEYOND THE INVISIBLE BARRIER OF THE KORAN - - - - - 65
Underground villages. A red-hot iron cure. Chained by dogma. What the world looks like through a slit in the *khauli*. A riding whip when wages are paid out.
- 5 - TO THE PYRAMIDS WITHOUT OUR TATRA - - - - - 79
A smash in the middle of the desert. Into Egypt.
- 6 - TOBRUK ACCUSES - - - - - 85
Five column retreat. *Vinceremo*. In the steps of the Czechoslovak regiment. Strong point S 19 HONZA. Calm before the storm. Death lies in wait. Dvořák's New World Symphony in the ruins of Tobruk. Eighty thousand graves.
- 7 - QUO VADIS, LIBYA? - - - - - 99
Sick strategy. Recipe for kings. Who will come out on top? He who sows the wind . . .
- 8 - THE NILE DELTA - - - - - 106
An unusual welcome. Banana fields between houses and tramcars. The city with the largest port in Africa. Security position ABC. Czechoslovakia in Egypt.
- 9 - AN UPSIDE-DOWN WORLD - - - - - 118
Four weeks of hunger and thirst. Cannonade over Cairo. Drinking water with sewage. Fighter planes and DDT. Egypt and the Security Council. The final goal.

- 10 - BENEATH THE MINARETS OF CAIRO - - - - - 130
The alabaster mosque. Studying with crossed legs. Coming back from the other shore. Ministrants in dinner suits. If you're afraid don't go to Muski. On the Garden City terrace. A roundabout in the water.
- 11 - SPENDING THE NIGHT ON KHUFU'S PYRAMID - - - - - 143
Climbing the pyramids by night. *Yalla emshi, yalla emshi...* Walking through five thousand years. Twenty thousand trainloads of stone. The sun rises over the Nile. Senseless destruction. Egypt old and new.
- 12 - A LAND WITH TWO FACES - - - - - 156
A funeral procession and spies. The hieroglyphics wake up. Knights in armour on the asphalt. Wood and water in the rocks. Africa to the left, Asia to the right.
- 13 - THE SAKIAS ARE SILENT - - - - - 169
Direction: Cape of Good Hope. The burial ground of the bulls robbed. *Java P.O.2878*. The beating of fifty thousand wings. Centimetres on which millions of lives depend.
- 14 - FROM KARNAK TO THE VALLEY OF THE KINGS - - - - - 179
A royal necropolis with a crown of green. The largest temple hall in the world. Eighty-six thousand Karnak statues. The secrets of Tutankhamon's grave. Fishermen round the Memnon colossi. Fifty pounds. *Allahu yahsin...*
- 15 - THIS IS THE MAN WHO BURIED THEM - - - - - 194
A vacuum between Cairo and Capetown. Into no-man's land. Eighteen wells over an area of 170,000 square kilometres. The first round. A procession of camels' skeletons.
- 16 - THE VACUUM HAS BEEN FILLED - - - - - 213
Ten nameless stations. An unexpected meeting in the desert. The last round. Losing our way with two bottles of tea. Supper with the jackals. A Czechoslovak car — the first and only one.
- 17 - SUDAN AT THE CROSSROADS - - - - - 229
The state treasury open to inspection. *Umma* versus *Ashigga*. An uncrowned king. The elephant's trunk. Young Sudanese at the dissecting table. A wedding without wedding guests. Will there be another Mahdi?
- 18 - ACROSS ERITREA TO THE RED SEA - - - - - 247
A mountaineering puzzle in the middle of the steppe. Asphalt once more after four thousand kilometres. Living corpses on the roads. To the west of Asmara. Representatives of the representatives of the Big Four. Tug-of-war over Eritrea. Two thousand five hundred bends in one hundred and thirteen kilometres. The monkeys attack.

INTRODUCTION

Jiří Hanzelka and Miroslav Zikmund spent their early years in widely different parts of the Czechoslovak Republic — Jiří Hanzelka in Štramberk in Moravia and for a time in the capital city of Slovakia, Bratislava; and Miroslav Zikmund in Pilsen, the metropolis of western Bohemia. But although they met for the first time in 1938, in Prague, where both began to attend the Commercial College, there were many things they had in common as lads. Travel was in fact the means of livelihood of both families. Ferdinand Hanzelka, whose son was born on Christmas Eve 1920, worked first as a labourer in the limestone quarries, but later on, when he had served his apprenticeship as a locksmith, he used to travel all over the country and even abroad on assembly jobs. He began travelling regularly after the first World War, when he started work as a driver for the Tatra Works in Kopřivnice, and drove back and fore over the whole of the country. As a racing motorist he later got to know many European countries. Miroslav Zikmund was born on February 14th 1919 in Pilsen, the son of an engine driver who travelled hundreds of thousands of kilometres in the course of his work.

From childhood both boys loved motor vehicles — as indeed every boy worthy of the name does. Zikmund could tell how he would stand with a crowd of lads and note down the licence numbers and the makes of the cars passing along the road, trying to guess where they had come from by the tracks left by the tyre treads, and discussing nothing so often as motor cars in the breaks between lessons. Jiří Hanzelka's first act as a motorist left him sadder and wiser: his father left the car he was driving standing on the street, and by the time he had had his dinner his son had managed to get it on to the blocks. The boy got the birch for it, but after that he was allowed to help his father with various small repairs, and thus motor vehicles became his hobby.

Naturally the lads had more than one hobby, and strange to say they made good use of them all later on. Another of Miroslav Zikmund's hobbies was learning foreign languages. The Pilsen Secondary School, which he attended, was one of the three schools in the country where pupils could

learn a foreign language as early as the fifth year. Mirek chose English, which he had started to learn on his own two years before. In his fifth year he chose Russian and French as additional voluntary subjects, nor did he neglect Latin, although at first it seemed pointless. He realised he had been wrong, later, when Latin was a great help to him in learning Italian and Spanish at College. Since German was compulsory in secondary schools, Miroslav Zikmund finished his education equipped with at least a grounding in seven foreign languages, supplemented later by the study of Arabic and a Syrian dialect. Languages were among Jiří Hanzelka's favourite subjects, too. He learned German from the time he was nine years old, started French at eleven, English at sixteen, and Russian in his spare time. To these he later added a knowledge of Swahili, which people use to make themselves understood all over Central and East Africa. A working knowledge of languages turned out to be very useful when they were on their travels.

Another hobby the lads shared was shorthand. Shorthand was an optional subject at the secondary school Miroslav Zikmund attended, but he did not neglect it. In 1938 he took part in a nation-wide shorthand competition and came second in the 80 words a minute class. Jiří Hanzelka attended the Commercial Academy in Smíchov, Prague, where shorthand was obligatory. Later both students learned how to adapt the Czech Herout-Mikulík shorthand to German and English. Their knowledge of shorthand was another thing which stood them in good stead on their journey across two continents. They both made good use of it when writing up their log-book, and when building up their dialogues, very important for writers if their story is to ring true. They took shorthand notes of their impressions of the countryside as they drove through and even learned to write shorthand in the dark, making notes for film commentaries while watching the films.

In spite of all his own work as a student Miroslav Zikmund earned money by coaching in Latin and Mathematics; right to the end of his secondary school career he studied with distinction. In this respect Jiří Hanzelka kept pace with him, achieving the same excellent results throughout the second half of his school career and matriculating with distinction. He kept it up at College, too, coming out top of his year.

This of course far from exhausts the interests of both lads. Photography, for example. Miroslav Zikmund began to take an interest in it as a boy, and when his interest grew deeper, in his third year at school, his art master helped to introduce him to the secrets of photography. Jiří Hanzelka studied laboratory photography for two years at the Smíchov Academy. Nor did they ignore music: Mirek Zikmund learned to play the violin well. Music was one of Jiří Hanzelka's passions from childhood, as we can see from the fact that

today he plays the piano, organ and accordion well. Another hobby they shared was the reading of travel books.

Like Miroslav Zikmund, whose favourite sport was mountaineering, Jiří Hanzelka paid plenty of attention to physical training. As a boy he was an active member of the Sokol organisation. In 1938 he won a place in the Prague Youths' Team which won the mixed ten-points competition, comprising five gymnastic exercises with apparatus and five items of light athletics. In the competition for individuals he won second place — an honourable achievement.

At the Commercial College Jiří Hanzelka studied pedagogics and didactics, which formed an essential part of their preparations for newspaper and radio educational work.

It is obvious that successful travellers and outstanding workers in any field are not just born; their achievements are based on profound knowledge which must be acquired from the earliest years. Miroslav Zikmund and Jiří Hanzelka met this demand fully. Looking at what happened to them after 1938 we see that even later on they did not stop learning, and that from that time onwards they deliberately devoted a great deal of their time to preparations for their future journey.

When the Nazis closed down the Czech universities and colleges in 1939 the friends parted and looked for any kind of job which would save them from having to go to Germany on forced labour. Jiří Hanzelka succeeded in getting a post in an insurance company office, but the Labour Exchange authorities would not leave him alone. The only chance he had to avoid being sent to Germany was to work on the land. And so he went as an agricultural labourer on a farm in Zhoř near Tábor. There he met with an accident at work, as a result of which he had a finger amputated. After several weeks in hospital he was allowed to enrol in the one-year co-operative school in Prague. Since the syllabus offered no difficulties, he was able to spend most of his time preparing for the journey he and his friend Miroslav Zikmund had decided to undertake some time in the future. And when he left the school and took up a position in the Co-operative he had the chance to acquire considerable experience of trade and commerce. He was employed in a department which had considerable contact with other occupied countries.

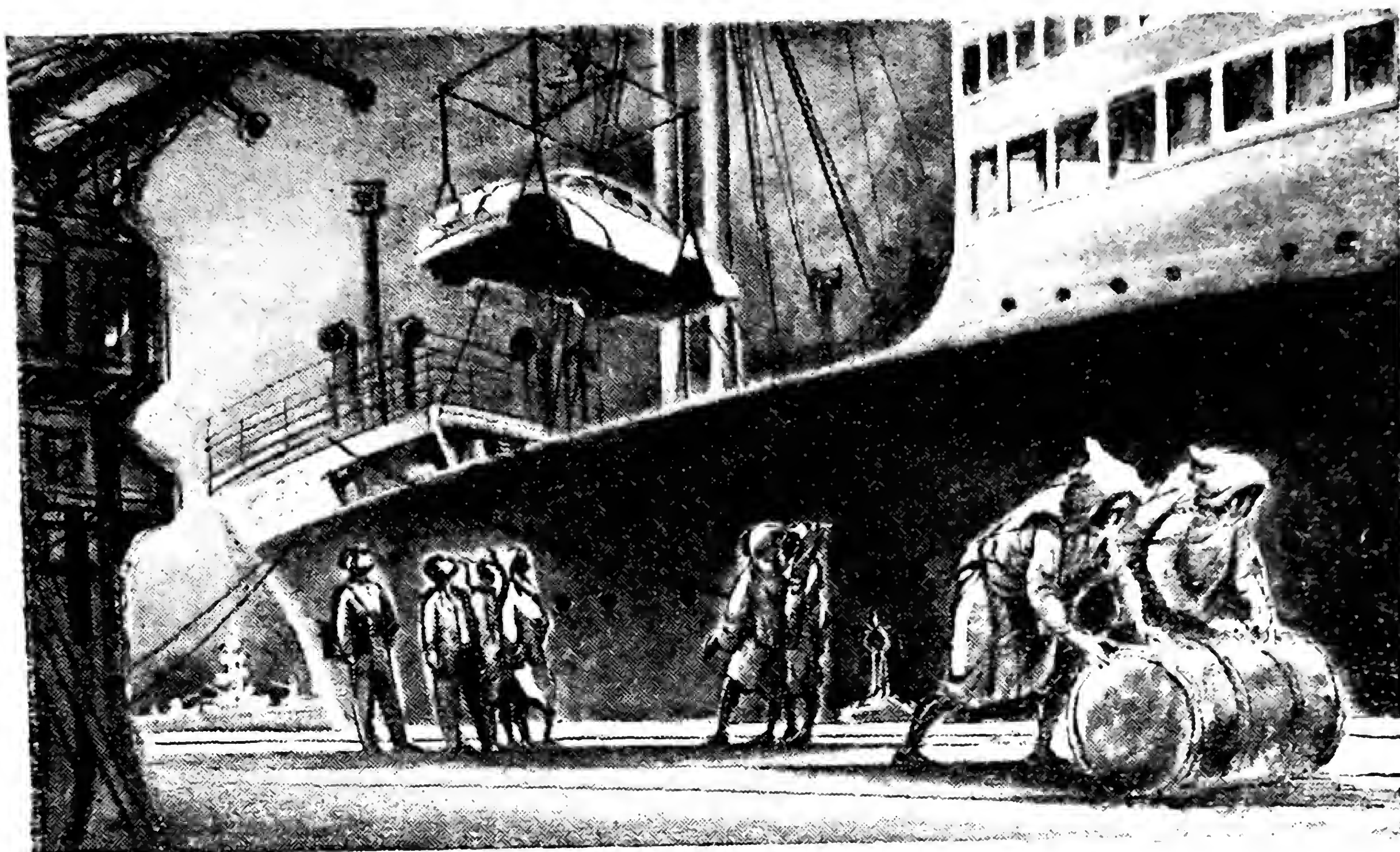
Miroslav Zikmund's fate during the war years was very similar. After November 17th 1939 he went to work in the Pilsen slaughter house, at first in the shambles and then in the suet and pork fat sheds. Half a year later he was transferred to the Bohemian-Moravian Milk and Fat Trust and then finally to Uniexport, a foreign trade company, where he got his first taste of foreign trade. Thus both friends landed in Prague commercial houses

where they were able to carry on together their preparations for the journey they proposed to make after the democratic forces won the war.

During the Occupation their preparatory work centred round the University and the Technical Libraries, improving their command of foreign languages, studying travel accounts, collecting maps and studying geographical and scientific works. In 1945 they had to make their general preparations more definite. Hanzelka and Zikmund went on with their studies at the Commercial College, aware of the necessity of drawing up a definite plan for their journey, acquiring money, planning how to meet the expenses of the journey itself, and — the main thing — getting hold of a car. The Ministry of Information gave them a scholarship of £ 2,000 for the venture; the rest of their expenses they met themselves from the money brought in by their newspaper articles and radio features. It is perhaps worth mentioning that on their return they gave the whole of their scholarship money back.

The Tatra Works in Kopřivnice lent them a car for the journey, naturally on condition both men would spend several months on practical work in the factory, getting to know the car down to the most minute details and learning how to carry out even big repair jobs. Hanzelka and Zikmund proved their efficiency as drivers and kept on improving. In October 1945 they passed their driving tests in the little town of Sušice in South Bohemia.

All obstacles overcome, and their college studies completed, Hanzelka and Zikmund set out on April 22nd 1947 to drive across Africa and South and Central America in a mass-produced Czechoslovak car. In the three volumes of their book "Africa, the Dream and the Reality", you will learn all about their travels in Africa. After three and a half years wandering over two continents they have finished writing up their experiences on their travels. Besides this book on Africa they have written over a thousand features for newspapers and the radio. The films they made themselves on their journey have made three full-length films and twelve short documentary films, and provided material for an exhibition which has been shown in all the larger towns in Czechoslovakia; they have also given a hundred and fifty lectures and discussion evenings in towns and in large factories. In 1953 their work was rewarded with the highest honour conferrable for outstanding achievement — the Order of the Republic. They are now working both on the material they have brought back from South and Central America, which will appear in four extensive volumes, and on preparations for another trip which will really be the completion of their journey round the world — travelling through Asia and Australia. The importance attached to Hanzelka and Zikmund's second trip is clear from the fact that it will be made under the auspices of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences.



Chapter One

TO THE SHORES OF MOROCCO

"... and so, goodbye, and we'll meet again here, in front of the Auto Club, three years from now!"

The last handshakes and the smiles of friends who have come to give us a send-off. Spring has come to Prague and scattered her silver visiting cards over the pavements and over the pale green of the trees. The rays of sunlight slid over the open roof of the car, touched the chromium of the seats and alighted on the two tropical sun-helmets.

"Think of Prague the first time you put them on in Africa!"

The film cameras buzzed, eyes narrowed on the cameras' viewfinders, a red light showed by the speedometer, and — we were off on the first yard of our journey round the world. The row of cars moved off, to accompany us as far as the boundaries of Greater Prague.

In their little boats anchored beneath Palacký Bridge fishermen sat gazing meditatively at the waters of the Vltava. The houses along the Smichov river-bank drew a curtain across the panorama of the Hradčany glowing in the morning sun. Women were hurrying along with their shopping bags. At the

Angel junction the tram-conductor shifted the points for the Number Sixteen to go through and pushed his rod back behind the battered bar as the traffic lights changed to green, opening the way out of Prague.

The houses grew fewer and the road beyond Motol wound between green banks. Rear-lights ahead of us, the sound of brakes — and the convoy drew up.

"This is the end of the world for us. You'll have to go the rest of the way alone . . ."

Smiles; silent, resolute handshakes.

"Give my love to Tobruk!"

We looked round for the last time at the row of cars which turned and disappeared down the road beyond Motol. We were alone. A cyclist braked to turn his head and look at the flags waving on our bonnet impatiently and restlessly, like a symbol.

All at once the fatigue of the last days and nights of worry fell away. The years of preparation, the thousands of hours we had spent poring over maps, over pages of print, over library shelves, and over clean sheets of paper — all this narrowed in an instant to a milestone on the road above Motol, which wrote full stop at the end of one chapter, and opened another.

The slender spire of Bartholomew's tower in Pilsen rose above the crown of the Rokycany road, and factory chimneys emerged from the curtain of smoke. The avenue of cherry trees down Slovanská Street was swimming in the fresh green and velvet of its blossom, a melancholy frame for our last handshakes.

Přeštice, Klatovy, the Šumava foothills. And then the frontier post in Železná Ruda, beyond which lay all the continents of the world. A bare-headed lad with mementoes for sale came running up to our Tatra.

"Buy a talisman for luck," he said. "Going far . . .?"

"Not so very far. Just from Czechoslovakia to Czechoslovakia."

He laughed, jingled the small change in his pocket and ran off. A cool breeze blowing from the deep woods of the Šumava Mountains ruffled the tops of the trees. We opened the wooden case with its poker-work view of the tower on Pancíř Hill, and got out our fountain pens.

"22. IV. 1947."

"I wonder where we shall be on the first anniversary of this day? And on the others . . .?"

A customs official stamped our passports and raised the barrier beside which gleamed the symbol of the Czechoslovak Republic. A few yards further on stood a board bearing the word *Deutschland*. Our first frontier.

"Bon voyage — and don't forget your homeland!"

Words stuck in our throats. Trees and thoughts flew backwards . . .

Germany and Switzerland from the road

Much has changed in Munich since the war ended.

Much of the debris in the battered city has been sorted into neat piles of bricks and heaps of bent and rusty iron. But people swarm about among the ruins like troglodytes and grumble because from the next ration period on they will only get 4,000 grammes of bread a month. There are few things more typical of post-war Germany than the Munich Arc de Triomphe. Once a faithful copy of the Berlin Brandenburgertor, today it has lost its monumental decorative figures; it is crippled, with nothing but the torso of the bronze lions and the antique pillars. The busy life of Munich hurries relentlessly by and the overcrowded Munich trams thunder beneath the arches all askew, just as they thunder down the main streets of Prague during the evening rush-hour.

The motionless stumps of the Gothic Frauenkirche grimace against the spring sky and from the ruins of the houses opposite they are carefully sorting out bricks, stone, iron and rafters. To the traveller passing through the living graveyard of the city it remains a mystery where all these thousands of people thronging the streets and hurrying to their place of work can possibly live. They only shrug their shoulders resentfully if you ask them whether they are better off now than during the war.

"They give us 600 grammes of meat a month — and during the war we could get oranges . . ."

In their "*man gibt uns*" you can hear their stored-up hatred, their humiliated pride, their dependence upon those who were meant to serve them and not to be doling out bread and meat by the gramme. You cannot help remembering the loud marches and the jackboots of the Nazi supermen, the luxurious cars sporting the swastika, and the bloated arrogance of the people who now, under the "protection" of the American occupation authorities, stand before you with an embarrassed, servile smile and palm outstretched.

The German roads are not too lively. You meet the occupation army's motor-cars, an occasional lorry, and now and again a foreign car. The millions of tons of concrete on the German highroads are having a rest, and the holes gaping in the side-roads grow larger accordingly.

Switzerland, by contrast, is living at top speed. You do not need to see the frontier posts and the stamps in your passport to realise that you have passed all at once out of one world into another. Instead of the blacked-out towns and villages of Germany you are welcomed by Lake Constance with its bunches of twinkling lights and the reflection of glowing neon signs. Maybe life has even speeded up a little since the war ended, but on the

whole the Swiss give the impression of not yet having realised the difference between the war years just passed and the present day. Berne, Zurich, Geneva, Lausanne, are just one stream of cars, all the latest models. Hundreds of cyclists weave their way in and out of the cars, calmly and in a disciplined fashion. A motorist with the noise of the Prague streets still ringing in his ears feels suddenly oppressed, and cannot understand how his Swiss colleague can consider pedestrians and cyclists his equals on the road. Rather than sound his horn he stops and waits while two friends in the middle of the road fix their next meeting and shake hands in farewell. The Swiss police never even dream of asking whether your horn is in order when they stop you on the road; they are only concerned with your brakes and your lights.

In Switzerland you can buy almost anything you want, but life is very expensive. Everybody in Switzerland grumbles about it when you compliment them on their peace-time prosperity.

"There's plenty of everything, alright, but where's the money to come from?"

In vain did we look for sugar for breakfast in Switzerland. Sugar was rationed and the ration was about half of that in our country. Czechoslovak sugar had recently made its appearance on the market, off the ration, but it was much more expensive.

"You ought to stay longer, and then you'd see that everything isn't as beautiful as it looks at first sight," we were told by the amateur broadcaster in Zurich whom we visited in order to send news of our journey home to radio amateurs in Czechoslovakia. "Don't forget you've been living in a cage for six years, while we were importing everything we needed. But you ought to stand in front of a shop-window and watch how many people can buy the things you see there..."

He was a higher civil servant, and lived in a poky little flat with modest furnishings. The leather patches on the elbows of his worn jacket did not point to too much prosperity...

An interesting feature of Swiss life are the automatic telephones. There is no need to mention the robots which deliver messages in your absence and record conversations and items of news which the owner of the telephone can listen to on his return. The ordinary public telephone booths in the streets are remarkable enough, equipped as they are like clean, neat little studies. The three volumes of the telephone book, arranged according to cantons, are hung side by side in such a way that when you pull one of them out it automatically opens. With the telephone books go sliding aluminium tables of distances with the rates for long-distance calls. A call from Berne to

Zurich costs 90 centimes, about a shilling. You drop your coin into the right slot, according to size; before dialling the required number you dial the three-figure number of the long-distance exchange, and you can talk to Zurich straight away; between six in the evening and six in the morning, while the lines are slack, the rate is lower by one third.

If you walk through the streets of Swiss towns after midnight, you are forced to wonder what garage-owners have to live on. As the flow of motor traffic in the streets gradually slows down during the evening, so the rows of cars parked alongside the pavements grow. The motorist can leave his car anywhere on the street without needing to fear not finding it in the same place next day. Confidence in the honesty of the Swiss is carried so far that they do not even lock their cars. In this way you can save not only valuable Swiss francs, but primarily a great deal of time, for there is no need to go looking for a suitable garage.

The Swiss are excellent psychologists. They are well aware that their mountains and lakes bring valuable currency into the country — currency which means American automobiles, English scooters, or Spanish oranges. They are helpful, polite and anxious to be of service. They are well aware of their international position, yet never forget to thank you with their characteristic “*merci vielmal*”.

Indo-Chinese in Avignon

The change over from the German to the French element is sudden. Incomprehensibly sudden. Fifty kilometres beyond Berne the German names on the signposts suddenly disappear and *Neuenberg* suddenly turns into *Neuchâtel*. And from that moment you will not hear a word of German. The calm Swiss become temperamental Frenchmen. And French goes with you all the way to the continent of Africa.

If you failed to notice the glittering luxury of Geneva with its marble palaces and the League of Nations in liquidation, and did not turn to look back at the alabaster circle of the Alps, you would not even realise that the gates of Switzerland had closed behind you and that you were descending sharply into the valley of the Rhône. On the Swiss-French frontier the anachronism of military occupation still exists, with this difference: the isolation zone is guarded by the military of the country itself. This survival is perhaps artificially preserved by motorists from the rest of France who travel to the frontier zone to buy cheap petrol. On entering France proper they have to pay an equalising tax to the same French government, but even so they make

a good profit on it, for petrol is two-thirds cheaper in the frontier zone. The French customs officials are used to seeing motorists from France with their petrol tanks quite dried up.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen," said the French customs official when he discovered our reserve tank full of petrol, under the front seat. "You'll have to pay duty on this — unless you can find room for it in the tank."

"But it's Czech petrol we've brought all the way from Prague."

"I can't help that, petrol's petrol."

And so the last twenty litres of Prague petrol found their way way from the reserve tank into the petrol tank. This was the petrol we had provided against a rainy day, so that we needn't waste time in Germany running from office to office and trying to get ration permits.

"Très bien, messieurs," the customs man laughed. "Now you can go through."

The mountain road winding between Labalme and Leymiat in no way suffers by comparison with the works of art of the Swiss or Italian road builders. The fertile slopes covered with vineyards soon give way to the open valley with its avenues of plane trees along the main roads. The peasant carts with their high wheels, drawn by donkeys, strike a strange note. Instead of luxurious Cadillacs ancient Renaults dating from the first World War rule the French roads, with their massive tyres and angular bodies. You feel as if you have somehow got into a jubilee exhibition for which some museum has lent its most ancient veteran cars. But by the time you have met a few hundred of these grandfathers of the road you begin to feel admiration for the powers of resistance and the technical qualities of these vehicles which ought to have landed in the cemetery long ago.

About a hundred kilometres north-west of Marseilles lies the old papal town of Avignon. Massive mediaeval ramparts surround the whole town with a wealth of buttresses. Modern hotels with hot and cold running water have been stuck on to the walls of the Gothic and renaissance churches without the slightest attempt to temper their appearance to fit the pure architecture of the church fronts.

It was May Day in the streets of mediaeval Avignon.

From early morning the paved streets rang with the feet of the thousands of working people who had gathered to express their disapproval of their government's policy. At times we got the impression that Hanoi had occupied the streets of Avignon. Representatives of the Indo-Chinese people, who were fighting in their homeland against the French, here marched by their side and under their protection and together with them called for the ending of the French government's senseless adventuring.

“Les mères françaises réclament la fin de la guerre en Indochine!”

“The mothers of France call for the ending of the war in Indo-China!”

Dark Indo-Chinese, most of them demobilised soldiers from the French colonial army, marched in an orderly fashion the length of the ramparts of Avignon to the brisk sound of a French band and to the applause of the French people — the people of the same France whose government was carrying on military operations against the people of Vietnam, fighting for their freedom; the French people, who were still living in the ruins of houses destroyed during the recent war, while milliards of their francs flowed into Indo-China in the form of munitions, machine-guns and aeroplanes to bring down in ruins the houses there, on the other side of the world, and to kill people who were asking for nothing but their freedom.

The streets thundered and the marching crowds were silent. Their silence held a threat, while the spring breeze swelled the coloured banners they carried high above their heads.

“Liberté, égalité, fraternité pour tout le monde!”

“Liberty, equality, fraternity for everybody!”

The loud music of the band, the applause of the crowd, the shouting of slogans.

“Liberated France wants a free Indo-China!”

That was in Avignon, where the voice of the French people was heard. Away down in Marseilles the city authorities organised cycle races through the main streets of the city, to distract the attention of the people of Marseilles. For in this greatest of French ports boats were being loaded with war material for Indo-China.

It was May Day in France . . .

Between Europe and Africa

We had only been in France a few days, but at every step we got the impression that the country was like a heavily laden train struggling hard to master the gradients of a mountain range. France was being stifled by strikes, government crises, grain crises and the apparently insoluble problem of wages and the black market. France was helpless and powerless in her internal confusion. You could sense behind every conversation the Frenchmen's lack of confidence in their government. Enormous posters announced that the salvation of France lay in a ten per cent reduction in prices. But a dock foreman in Marseilles smiled bitterly as he spoke of the government's price policy and said:

"And do you know that a fortnight ago prices were raised by twenty-five per cent all round? With a system like ours there's always plenty of time to consider slow reductions . . ."

The French papers almost every day printed front page reports of the burning down of yet another nationalised industrial plant. It was clearly a matter of organised sabotage. Nationalised industry lacked the strength to get into its stride because it was being deliberately hampered by the capitalists, who were left with a wide field of activity during the process of gradual nationalisation. The public was disgusted by the endless debates on the vital problems of the country which dragged on and on in Parliament because the proposals made by the progressive representatives of the people always came up against the stubborn resistance of the capitalists' parliamentary defenders.

It was not hard to bid farewell to the land which had lost its right to the age-old name of "sweet". France had grown bitter.

The day to say goodbye to Europe drew near.

Before we left Prague we had been told of the difficulty of getting a passage from Marseilles to Africa. The lack of boats was still desperate, although two years had passed since the end of the war. It was of no avail to telegraph a booking from Prague beforehand. The agency offices obviously had a higher opinion of passengers who were willing to pay a fat tip when buying their tickets, than of customers thousands of kilometres away from their place of business.

After trying for several days we finally succeeded in getting third class passage on the French boat *Koutoubia*, which sailed regularly between Marseilles and the shores of Morocco.

It was the fifth of May, the second anniversary of the memorable Prague rising, when we drove through the streets of Marseilles to the docks behind the car of Paul Drezen, the shipping company's agent. The *Koutoubia* was waiting by the pier, and the last of the freight was disappearing into her entrails. Last of all she was to take on board the passengers' cars. She was to . . .

There was a sudden scream of brakes ahead of us, a crash, the sound of falling glass and metal, and then silence.

A car which shot out of a side street had dug itself into the rear door of Drezen's Citroën. Water from the radiator poured over the road and people came running up from all sides.

"Are you hurt, Monsieur Drezen?"

"Not at all," said Paul, and forced open the twisted door of the car to climb out. "It would be worse if it had happened to you as a farewell gift

from France. Look at that fool, the face he's making." He pointed to the driver of the other car. "Is that the way to drive?"

The police were writing their report, and the minutes flew by.

"Monsieur Paul, excuse me, but the *Koutoubia's* leaving in forty minutes and all our papers are in the Customs Office. Should we cancel our tickets?"

"Not on your life! Wait a minute, we're nearly ready. I'll have the bus pulled to one side and you can give me a lift. I needn't be afraid of losing her . . ."

At the dock we had a lively argument.

"You can see they're covering the hold. You ought to have turned up in time. We can't wait."

Then Paul Drezen took a hand. Without a word. He just pulled out his wallet and waved it over his head, whistling to the crane-driver sitting away up in his cabin. The dock hands spread a net out on the quay and the Tatra was soon rising towards the sky. A quick bit of filming, handshakes, and we took our last steps on European soil. The sailors were getting ready to raise the gangway.

"I'll send the bill of lading after you to Casablanca by air. It'll be there a day before you are," shouted Paul from below and waved for the last time. "Au revoir, mes amis . . ."

The journey from Marseilles to Casa, as the French call Casablanca, lasts three days. Those three days are quite long enough for you to get thoroughly acquainted with your fellow-passengers leaving Europe. Government officials, unemployed seeking their bread in Africa, tourists with travel agency booklets and carefully worked out programmes for big game hunting, Senegalese, Arabs, and men of all complexions and tongues in the uniforms of the French colonial army, who are constantly fluctuating between the shores of France and Africa.

The confusion and wild haste of embarking, tinged with the smell of rotting water and coloured patches of oil alongside the quay, slowly settled down when the propeller blades churned up the surface of the water beneath the overfed belly of the boat. There is no band to give you a send off, nor the traditional waving of tear-stained handkerchiefs from beyond the gangway; nothing but the terse commands uttered by the first officer and the explosions of the dynamite charges which are still used to blow up the last obstacles in the way of free entrance to the harbour. And then the line of the horizon mingles land with sea and France disappears for good behind you.

Only the sea-gulls remain faithful.

International regulations demand that shortly after leaving port the commander of every ship should test his safety measures and the capacity of his

lifeboats to hold the passengers. This provides a most interesting drama of the caste system ruling the society gathered on this tiny floating island for three days and three nights. The ship's wireless announces that the show will begin in an hour's time. A few minutes after the alarm signal, rather reminiscent of the air-raid warnings during the war, you can see dishevelled, excited ladies buttoning their clothes as they run, and nervously trying to fix cork life-belts round their hips. From the passage leading from the first class cabins to the deck an elderly gentleman rushes out; obviously the alarm caught him in the act of shaving, but he rushes to the mustering point which the ship's regulations hanging in his cabin have laid down. The rest of the passengers merely smile at this exaggerated instinct of self-preservation, while the fourth class passengers reclining on the boards covering the hatchways go on calmly throwing dice.

Fear for one's life increases according to the price of one's ticket and the weight of one's purse . . .

At dawn on the third day Europe bids you a last farewell. You leave behind the rocky shores of sunny Spain and the misty range of Sierra Nevada, and the threatening bulk of Gibraltar suddenly looms up on the horizon. The telescope brings its steep rocky face with its concrete plugging almost within reach, and lays bare the hundreds of well-disguised strongpoints from which the muzzles of guns are pointing. But it does not allow you to get a real impression of what the milliards have been invested in within these rocks. Milliards which have transformed the last outpost of the continent of Europe into a threatening safe for the key to Albion's shaken mastery of the seas.

Tangier overture

The first contact with Africa makes a fantastic impression on the European visiting the continent for the first time. The impression is fantastic, in spite of the fact that he has seen the faces of Arabs and the widespread ears of donkeys countless times on the screen. International Tangier draws you into its whirl and makes you gasp for breath.

Not just because of the hoarse and forever quarrelsome women selling eggs, oranges, and much-handled loaves of bread with their penetrating smell of olive oil and all kinds of oriental spices. Nor just because of the flood of unusual colours and shapes, clothes and faces, and the looks at first casual and suddenly full of hatred. Nor just because of the incredible poverty and dirt in which the poorest people live, in contrast to the luxurious American cars from which the veiled faces of Arab women look out.

When you leave the boat to make best use of the three-hour stay in port by looking round the town, you are surrounded by crowds of Arabs wearing the typical dirty *burnous* and leather slippers. Like beasts of prey they rush at the passengers gathering at the gangway. They not only offer their arm muscles, their broken-down taxis, bananas, carpets, daggers, embroideries and coloured post-cards in doubtful taste, but also a host of valueless trashy articles which do not even boast a name in any European dictionary. They not only count with white customers, but also — and that most of all — with the coloured soldiers who are not allowed to go on shore. Not even the Arab watchmen who try to keep them away from the boat with long sticks are able to subdue them. They come to terms with their customer by shouting from a distance and wait for the best moment to reach the cabin porthole and receive their money, which will last them for a carefree life until the next boat comes in. Hundreds of healthy young men wander about the streets of Tangier with nothing on their tray but a heap of dusty sweets or a few postcards, and plague the passers-by to purchase.

That is one side of life in Tangier. The other is about the same, only on a larger scale. Tangier is under international administration. In practice this means that no cumbersome regulations hamper the freedom of trade. The engineers and waiters on board ship look forward all through the voyage to going on shore at Tangier and buying an unlimited quantity of oranges, cigarettes and chocolate, which they sell at a good profit at the other end of the voyage. You understand at once how all the touters make their living, who are to be seen in front of the Marseilles hotels offering everything for sale at fantastically high prices. Tangier is the source of these easy incomes. In the manner of mediaeval Italian bankers the owners of currency exchange booths change the money of every possible country right on the street. Here you can get Argentine pesos just as easily as Egyptian piastres or East African shillings. The rates of exchange are hung up outside each booth, and change from day to day. Tangier is the gateway through which come luxury goods for which import licence cannot be got either in neighbouring Morocco or in Spain, only a few kilometres away by sea. For hard currency you can get everything in Tangier, from nylon stockings to the latest American eight-cylinder cars.

Stamp collectors would have a wonderful time in Tangier. They would not even have to pay black-market prices, for postage stamps are perhaps the only goods in Tangier for which there is a fixed price. Two hundred yards away from the Post Office where they put Moroccan stamps on your letters is a Spanish Post Office selling the same stamps as they stick on post-cards in Catalonia or Andalusia. And another two hundred yards further on

the British frank their letters to Canada or Australia with little oblong pictures of King George notched all round and with the word *Tangier* printed across them in black under his chin.

When you leave the territory of Tangier you see at once the reason for all the misery of its inhabitants. It is the result of the tug-of-war going on for this strategically important strip of land opposite the Gibraltar safe and which was in the end decided by the capitalists of a handful of countries without their taking the slightest interest in the views of the Arab inhabitants. And thus there came into being the "free" international zone where a small caste of foreign importers, traders and speculators together with a small number of wealthy Arabs were given unrestrained freedom to exploit. The Arab population were left with the "freedom" to live in poverty, hunger, unemployment and distress.

Casablanca — the White House

The same feeling of uncertainty and lack of confidence which you see at every step in France is characteristic of Morocco. The only difference is that in Morocco the problem is wider and more delicate. Unlike Algeria, which is a department of France and as such comes directly under the Ministry of the Interior in Paris, Morocco, like Tunisia, is a French colony administered by the Ministry for the Colonies. These differences make no difference to the fact that in all three regions the opposition to French rule is growing every day.

There is much talk of the threat to France's position in Morocco itself.

The very day we arrived in Casablanca there was a review of French warships in the harbour, headed by the largest battleship, the *Richelieu*, of 35,000 tons. This was the same battleship on which a few weeks previously the French President Auriol had travelled to Dakar, where he had devoted his first speech on African soil to the "close ties" binding West Africa to France.

There were tanks gathered under the palms along the main boulevards of Casablanca, ranks of white and coloured soldiers, tattooed Senegalese, detachments of the Foreign Legion, all to the stirring noise of drums and typical French bugles. There was an oppressive tension in the air, fear and determination, threats and challenge; below the surface it was a matching of strength. By the afternoon the streets looked normal again, but you could hear French settlers asking anxiously:

"Shall we hang on here? Can we hold on?"

The Casablanca papers treated this event as a powerful demonstration and accompanied it by the remark that France was still a great sea power. It was a threatening gesture for the benefit of public opinion in Morocco, where the ever-growing internal conflicts in France and the blows her power had suffered were only too well known. A few days later M. Labonne, Resident in Morocco, was replaced by General Juin, who had until recently been directing military operations in Indo-China. This appointment made it sufficiently clear how delicate France considered her position in Morocco to be. The Resident who had been recalled was sharply criticised for lack of firmness and for not having prevented the Sultan of Morocco from making the unfortunate speech on Tangier soil which had caused the French authorities so much unpleasantness. France was fully aware of the rapid growth of the progressive movement and acted accordingly. She was strengthening her garrisons and building more strongholds throughout the country. On our way from Rabat to Fez along winding mountain roads we were constantly having to avoid the never-ending stream of heavy military lorries loaded with mountain cannon, munitions, machine-guns, light tanks — load after load . . .

Casablanca itself is a typical example of the social and cultural contrasts of Morocco. In Spanish its name means the White House, and it does indeed blind you with the magnificence of its palaces, its tall sky-scrapers and its wide boulevards, which do not seem at all African. Beneath slender palms and scented oleanders flows a mingled throng of Berbers, negroes from French Equatorial Africa, elegant European women, veiled Arab women, white and coloured soldiers in the uniforms of the French army, and last but not least American tourists and "tourists". The latter "tourists" are coming to Morocco in ever increasing numbers — equipped with plans of sea and air bases and with proposals for setting up Franco-American business concerns which will gradually push French capital and even France herself out of North Africa.

The leading statesmen and chiefs of staff of the western powers chose white Casablanca for the seat of their deliberations during the war; here in enchanting gardens and shady patios beneath a changeless azure sky they prepared the last phase of the plan for a "third" African front which was to banish the phantom of the threat to Suez and the Near East. It was shortly after the declaration of the ostentatious points of the Atlantic Charter, that paper programme of humanity and free will and freedom of conscience.

The "representatives" of western culture certainly forbore to visit the terrible slums of the Casablanca Busbir quarter, the lowest depths of misery and the humiliation of human personality.

In the seat of the Foreign Legion

After landing in Casablanca we spent almost the whole day looking in vain for somewhere to spend the night. Our fellow-countrymen's efforts were of no avail, nor was an appeal to the Préfecture. The housing problem in Casablanca extended even to the hotels. And so after fruitless search we fell back on our last expedient and only a few hours after landing on the continent of Africa tried out our travelling bedroom. When we left Prague we had of course had no idea that we should make use of our folding beds and sleeping bags in the middle of the ten-storey modern buildings and the luxury hotels of Casablanca.

In Casablanca there is quite a large colony of Czechoslovaks, who have their own club, boasting even a library. Nevertheless at every step you can see the consequences of the slow but inevitable process by which the immigrants are absorbed by the local population. The fault does not lie only with the parents. In many cases there is an obvious desire to keep up their mother tongue, but often the parents' professional duties do not leave them enough time to devote sufficient attention to their children's education to prevent the influence of French schools from getting the upper hand. After thirty years of exile the parents still speak good Czech, but the children, who are in daily contact with French and Arab children, often only know a few stereotyped Czech phrases and are not at all willing to speak the language of their parents.

Side by side with those of our countrymen who are slowly saving up franc by franc to be able to return to their homeland, and who are still Czechoslovak citizens, lives another group, relatively smaller in number — naturalised Frenchmen. French from a variety of reasons. Some have married French wives, and considered it more sensible in a foreign environment to adopt the citizenship of that state. Some are employed by the French state administration, and for them the change was a condition for holding down their jobs. And finally there are a few of our "fellow-countrymen" for whom obtaining French citizenship appears to mean something like being raised to the peerage. It remains a fact that the new generation growing up under these conditions is inevitably swallowed up by its surroundings.

In Rabat we met a Czech professor at the Technical College, who has been living in Morocco ever since 1920 and is married to a Frenchwoman. Their eight-year-old son does not speak a word of Czech, although the father still speaks faultless Czech in spite of his exile lasting almost thirty years. With tears of emotion he showed us a copy of Bezruč's Silesian Songs which he had bound himself. It was his greatest treasure, and his only complaint

was that he was forced to speak French with his wife in order not to stumble during his lectures in College. His employers would not like that . . .

And then there is yet another group of Czechoslovaks in French North Africa. We met them later, when we went on to Algeria. A few tens of kilometres from the Moroccan frontier stands the little town of Sidi bel Abbes. Through its gates have passed tens and hundreds of thousands of men driven from home by youthful indiscretion and the thirst for adventure, or by some blot on their good name. Sidi bel Abbes is the seat of the Foreign Legion — two words which speak for themselves.

The Foreign Legion has always been a conglomeration of all nationalities, and Czechs and Slovaks were always to be found there too. Young men who left their homes for the furnace of the Sahara fortresses, in order to think over at their leisure the motives which made them take this step, are still to be found here. Many of them have already served their obligatory five years and even many another long year spent at every possible station of this swashbuckling organisation of adventurers. It may surprise you to hear German at every step. Then you discover that eighty per cent of the new recruits are German Nazis. Nobody asks them why they have come here; they sign on for five years, and that is the end of their past. Naturally the majority have taken refuge in the Foreign Legion in order to escape denazification courts in Germany.

The French commander of the Information Service granted our request and showed us over the barracks and arranged for us to talk to the Legionnaires. That part of the barracks which is thus open to inspection by the public is clean and pleasant, in marked contrast to the living quarters. Before we had been in the barracks over a quarter of an hour several of our fellow-countrymen had gathered round us. It is an interesting fact that most of them do not know each other. They see no point in it, for here in the Foreign Legion the question of nationality and language is truly secondary. Some of them had spent the last few years in Indochina and returned to Africa wounded.

Money was of prime importance here.

“Were you better off in Indochina than you are here?”

“If it weren’t for the damned diseases I’d go back like a shot,” calmly answered Václav Trnka from Dolní Bojanovice, a non-commissioned officer in the Foreign Legion. And he added by way of explanation:

“I joined the Legion in thirty-one. I spent five years as a prisoner of war in Indochina and then they sent me back here. Here I’m lucky if I get five notes in my pay, and out there it used to make as much as thirty-four.”

The fact that in Indochina he was a mercenary forced to massacre the

people of Vietnam, and that he was still limping from a leg-wound, meant nothing to him compared with the fact that in Indochina his bosses paid him more than three times his normal wage.

We were surprised to find that there were a number of young Czechoslovaks who had joined the Legion after the war. We met some of them, and they confirmed what we had heard — that a week before our arrival a large transport had left for Indochina, including several dozen Czechs. This young generation of the Foreign Legion is indeed a sad chapter. All the sadder because the motives and reasons which forced them to leave their homeland are in nine cases out of ten veiled in taciturn silence.

"That's the only right we are left with, here," twenty-eight-year-old Jaroslav Pilař from somewhere near the Krkonoše Mountains answered evasively when we questioned him.

"I'd go back tomorrow, if I could. I can't get along with my French here," he added after a while, gazing at the wall with his thoughts far away. The next was no more communicative; he came from Klatovy, and his mother still lives in Švihov near Klatovy.

"What pay do the new recruits get?"

"Three hundred and twenty francs a month," answered Karel Škampa shortly, and raised his eyes to ours from his glass of beer.

"Not much, is it?"

"Hmm, much? Go out and buy yourself a meal here, and you'll see."

We knew it very well, because in this self-same Sidi bel Abbès we had paid six hundred francs for a very modest supper for two. A supper for one, with a glass of the wine that is exported from Algeria by the million hectolitres, costs as much as the monthly pay of a Legionnaire who has just signed on for five years.

How much better employed would Karel Škampa and others like him be at home, than here in Sidi bel Abbès waiting to be sent in a few days or a few months to some out-of-the-way post in the wild mountains of western Morocco, or to make up the thinned-out ranks of some detachment in Indochina . . .

Those who left home out of sheer love of adventure and did not burn their boats behind them will not be lost. In a few years' time they will return, cured by bitter experience, unless they meet the fate of thousands fallen or wounded on the battlefield. But by far the greater number disappear here like a stone dropped into the water, having thrown their past into the murky waters of silence and weighted it with a millstone to prevent it ever seeing the light of day again.

We need not feel pity for these men.

People of two worlds

Maghreb el-Aksa, "the western end of the world", the furthest outpost of the world of Islam, a land of contrasts — that is Morocco.

Far to the south the sharp peaks of mountains thirteen thousand feet high in the Atlas range, and to the north fertile, level plains. The furnace heat of the Sahara desert blows from far inland well beyond the band of asphalt linking the east of the country with the west. The snowy brows of great mountains gleam beneath the African sun. This is a land of ten-storey buildings with marble staircases, where in the entrance passages you meet with starving Arabs who sleep all the year round on the streets. This is the land whose Moorish rulers in the twelfth century seized for themselves power over the whole of North Africa, from the Egyptian borders to the furthest oasis in the south of the Sahara, and got a firm foothold on the Pyrenean peninsula.

Enchanting Fez still tells of their glory, that living museum of Arabian history. The American traveller Richard Halliburton, who saw perhaps everything there was to be seen in the world, wrote in his "Flying Carpet" that he would like to return once more to that city of the proud maturity of the Arabian Middle Ages. It is no wonder, for it is indeed impossible to forget the narrow streets of Fez, where in dim dens the descendants of famous mosque builders make filigree bracelets as fine as cobwebs, gold-ornamented leather bookbindings, beaten silver bowls and wonderful carpets. You will never forget the rise and fall of the melody and the slow rhythm to which turbanned workers batter down a broken street in Fez during a violent shower of rain which turns the street into a torrent. Nor can you forget the sing-song repetition of the Koran in an Arab school, followed by a chorus of shouted *suras* from the Prophet's Holy Book.

A few kilometres from Meknes is the cradle of the Moors' power — Moulay Idriss, an enchanting little town spreading in picturesque fashion at the foot of Jebel Zerhun, quite untouched by civilisation. The flat roofs of the little houses go down in terraces into the valley, where a proud mosque has been raised over the body of the Prophet's friend. For centuries the Arabs kept the secret of the town hidden from the curious eyes of the infidel. It was not until 1801 that the Englishman James Jackson succeeded in gleaning the first information about this interesting jewel of Arab history. Today at the walls of Moulay Idriss a huddle of begging children greets you and accompanies you wherever you go. Clouds of flies rise buzzing from the open channels of filth in front of every house; yet there are people living in these half-derelict hovels. Here they eat, sleep, work, and bring others into the world . . .

You go out into the *suk*. Here are Arab cobblers, tinkers, beltmakers, tailors. Groups of Arabs crouch in a circle round a pot of coffee. The craftsmen put aside their work and lie down in the street for a nap, taking up their tools again in an hour or so. There is no call for hurry here. You are shocked at the sight of the children with flies crawling all over their faces, into their nostrils and round the teeth in their open mouths. All of a sudden you trip over a bundle of rags lying in a puddle. You jump back in a trice, because the bundle moves and makes a desperate effort to get up. It is an old woman who has not even enough strength left to beg a bite to eat. She lies in the street slowly dying and people step carelessly over her without taking the slightest notice.

And yet it is a human being!

No, it is only an old woman about to die.

It makes you shiver. All around people are walking about, talking, bargaining, begging, and sleeping.

Moulay Idriss forces you to think deeply about the abysmal contrast between the wealth of Morocco and its rulers and the unimaginable poverty of the Arab people. The state in which these miserable human beings have to live is not only the consequence of thousands of years of Islam and its fatalism, unshakeable faith in the fate destined by Allah. It is the consequence of the rule of all the lords of the land up to now, none of whom had ever the slightest interest in awakening the people from their lethargy because this inertia together with illiteracy was the best guarantee of easy exploitation. Nor is it different today, under French rule.

The French colonisers did not change the type of government at all, nor did they attempt to change the appearance of the country or the character of the people. That is why their richly illustrated travel prospectuses of Morocco show neither the shocking picture of poverty offered by Moulay Idriss, nor the children begging in the shadow of fine palaces, nor the half-starved craftsmen working in two square yards of a stinking hovel in Fez.

"We have a hard job ahead," we were told in Casablanca by a young dockworker, a member of the Communist Party of Morocco. "Ninetyfive percent of the people are still illiterate in Morocco. We have to fight the backwardness of the people, and so Party members spend their Sundays and holidays in the country, teaching both children and grown ups to read and write, free of charge. We try to teach them the elements of hygiene, and draw up identification papers for the people in each village, otherwise hardly anybody knows when they were born . . ."

Barely two kilometres from Moulay Idriss you will find the remains of the Roman town of Volubilis.

The pure architecture of the triumphal arch, the mosaic atria, the plumbing system two thousand years old, mills for pressing olive oil, the paved main street and the broken architraves beneath the slender columns with their Corinthian capitals remind one that long ago the turbulent stream of life of the antique empire flowed through here.

"Mare nostrum", whose shores on every side were under the rule of Rome at the end of the first century, soon witnessed a great wave of building activity by the Romans. Wealthy Romans carried the comfort and luxury of Rome to all corners of their world, on the backs of their slaves. And thus on the shores of Africa there arose cities which were a faithful copy of the Roman capital.

If a citizen of the ancient and once flourishing city of Volubilis were to appear in his city today and look around, he might be surprised by the electric light in the French government offices, by the officials' motor-cars or by the planes which the French monopolists use to shorten the dull, tiring thousands of kilometres of the Sahara desert on their business journeys. He would be less surprised, perhaps, by the asphalt and concrete roads built by the French, and it would seem quite natural to him that the French rulers treat the people of the Mauretania of today with the same inclemency as the one-time rulers of glorious Volubilis.

Fundamentally there has been no change here for two thousand years. Under the Roman Empire this stone luxury and comfort belonged to despotic Caesars, while beyond the palace walls the people had to slave and die of hunger. Today the French capitalists have exchanged the stone atria for tiled bathrooms and the antique temples for the foyer of the Stock Exchange.

The exploited people slave and die of hunger just the same.





Chapter Two

THROUGH ALGERIA AND TUNISIA

Al Djazair is an expression in Arabic which means "islands".

Algeria gets its name from this term. We do not know whether the Arabs coming from the sun-dried East considered this land an isle of Paradise, or whether they called it thus by chance, because of some island near the coast. However it may be, Algeria was certainly never an island of peace and quiet.

Just as in the other two countries which went to make up the ancient province of Africa Minor — Morocco and Tunisia — one ruler has followed another in Algeria. After the Phoenician founders of the city of Carthage, the ruins of which are still to be seen not far from the capital of present-day Tunisia, the Romans came on the scene. Then the Vandals and the Byzantines poured over the land; in the end even they had to give way to the savage Arabs, who drove even the Berber settlers far into the mountains of the interior. The Moorish dynasty which originally settled near the ruins of the Roman city of Volubilis and founded the legendary Fez acquired extraordinary power during the two centuries which followed and penetrated far to the

north, on to the Pyrenean peninsula, and far to the south towards the interior of Africa. After the fall of the Moorish Empire the land became the scene of struggles between the Spaniards and the Turks, until at last the French put an end to the ravages of Turkish pirates. Today Algeria is a part of France and is governed directly from the Ministry of the Interior in Paris. It is also the most important of the three bulwarks of French colonial power in North Africa. You realise this at once when you cross the frontier from Morocco.

The burnt desert which has accompanied you for over two hundred kilometres from the interior of Morocco as far as Oujda suddenly disappears as if by magic. Beyond the steep cliffs round Tlemcen all at once appear stretches of vineyards, olive groves, rich pastures, woods of cork-oak and almond trees, fragrant gardens and endless fields of corn.

Above the abyss of Constantine

You cannot very well talk about Algeria and forget her mountains.

Because of their inexhaustible variety the mountains of Algeria are an incomprehensible contrast to the terribly depressing desert. A few kilometres beyond the Moroccan frontier (at Tlemcen) the road to Oran divides into two. You will not regret having chosen the one which leads through the interior, across the Mansoura. The Swiss or Austrian Alps are courteously polite, rather like the guide in a charabanc, for they warn you from afar to prepare for an unexpected sight. The mountains of Algeria are subtle, calculating and aggressive. Without the slightest warning they put before you a scene so strange that you rub your eyes to see whether it is really there.

Beyond the Mansoura you suddenly feel as if you had suddenly descended into Cyclops' cave, from whence there is no escape. The sheer cliff walls soar towards the sky; you cannot see where they end, because their peaks are lost in the wild surge of the fleeing clouds. From time to time the sun breaks through and like a theatre spotlight its beam lights up the spectrum of a rainbow arched over the storming floods of water falling with deafening roar from the heights and disappearing in the abyss below the narrow steel bridge. You have to cover the lens of your camera carefully, to protect it from the shower of spray rising like a cloud of feathers. You have just seen the Mansoura waterfall at the time when the inhabitants of the house at the other end of the bridge were moving their possessions out of the way of the rising flood-waters, which threaten them with incomprehensible regularity every five years.

Equally wild and beautiful are the mountains along the coast between Affreville and Blida. The sight of the white houses sticking to the sheer cliffs before Burkika involuntarily call to mind the Dalaj Lama's eagle-nest in Lhasa. The slopes of the mountains are a mass of green, the almond trees lining the sharply winding mountain road are bent low beneath the weight of their ripening fruit, while far down below in the valley the fields of grain billow as they wait for the harvesters' hand.

Constantine is without doubt the finest piece of staging the Algerian mountains have to show. Here, half-way between the frontiers of Tunisia and the town of Algiers, you come upon the steep canyons of Colorado transported here from the American West. Their walls, riven by time, sun and water, suddenly stretch out their arms to form the first, the lowest bridge, above a cave-like tunnel. The second bridge was built a little higher by the Romans, who wanted to prove to themselves that they could not only set up the bold arches of a viaduct, but that they could join two distant worlds. Today the giddy abyss of Constantine is bridged by the narrow ribbon of a road suspended on steel cables, which were embedded in the two cliff-faces opposite each other in 1863. El Kantara, as the Arabs call this bridge, connects the railway station on Jebel Mansoura with the other half of gleaming white Constantine, whose appearance does full justice to the majesty of an eagle-nest town. This was one of the last strongholds to capitulate before the superior numbers of the French.

In the vineyards of Algeria

If you read the reports of the French transport companies which announce the regular arrival and departure of boats and their cargoes, you will be astounded at the huge quantities of vegetables, grain, fruit, and - above all - wine which sail all the year round from the shores of Algeria to the centre of the French Empire. We were given a convincing explanation of the source of all this wealth.

A hundred kilometres before reaching Algiers we left the sunsoaked countryside for curtains of rain falling from heavy, leaden clouds - rain it would be impossible to measure by our standards of weather. In the course of a few short minutes tons of water fall from the Algerian sky. And a minute later the sun is shining and the air is hot and heavy. It is like a hothouse where you can see the rich vegetation growing almost before your very eyes.

It would be difficult to find a more suitable textbook example of the wealth of Africa. In every country where such wealth is divided according

to merit among those who co-operate with nature to produce it, you would see happy, healthy and contented people.

Instead as you pass along the road you meet Arabs dressed in dirty rags; you pass mud huts where naked children toddle out, suffering from hunger and disease; and in the wide vineyards you meet workers who recall the pictures of serf labour before the time of Emperor Joseph.

What is the explanation?

You look far for it, just as in neighbouring Morocco. The land in Algeria is owned by French big capital and banks, together with a handful of wealthy Arab bigwigs who have earned the good will of the French colonial authorities for their treacherous "services".

In the Sahara oasis of Bou Saada a few days later we met a young Arab waiter. After we had been talking for a quarter of an hour his frozen mistrust melted and he began to take us into his confidence.

"I've only been a waiter here for three months," he said. "I've got to earn a few hundred francs or I can't carry on with my studies. It costs me an awful lot of money and my father can't help me."

"Where does your father work?"

"Work?" repeated young Yussuf Ben Amin lowering his voice. "He used to have a job, before they threw him out of the vineyards. There were fourteen of us children and we all had to work with Father and Mother in the fields or else we'd have died of starvation. We couldn't even go to school, because our earnings were too small."

"What does a man earn in the vineyards?"

"A grown man earns sixty or even eighty francs a day, but a child barely thirty," he answered.

We compared these wages (which are a third of the minimum required for bare existence) with the cost of living - and with the profits the owners of these Algerian estates make.

The average sum one hectare of vineyard brings in annually is about 150,000 francs. In Algeria it is not at all rare for one man to own several thousand hectares, from which he has an unheard-of unearned income.

Celluloid Kasba

The town of Algiers is a chapter on its own.

Entering the streets at twilight you can imagine you are in a fairytale. Modern buildings several stories high, neon-light advertisements, crowded streets full of life, wide roads full of traffic. The quay is lined by a two-

storied arcade; garlands of light mark the half-circle of the harbour with the beams of the lighthouse at each end piercing the star-lit velvet of the night. Looking inland from the sea you imagine that Algiers was built by the builders of sky-scrapers, for the oblong patches of light made by the windows rise terrace on terrace into the darkness of the night. They get smaller and smaller as they rise, until the highest of all are nothing but tiny silver-paper squares. That is Algiers by night.

But if you catch sight of this Algiers next morning, you see before you a tired dancer after a masked carnival. Of the night's enchantment nothing is left but the luxury hotels and the Governor's palace with the diadem of beautiful villas built along the summit of the horseshoe hill surrounding the harbour of Algiers. Only the terraces on every house convince you that this is indeed the same Algiers that so enchanted you by night. The rest of the town has retreated deep into the harbour, into the narrow, dirty streets with their stinking gutters, and into Kasba, the notorious poor quarter with its houses of ill-fame. Into that Kasba which has provided the background for many a dramatic scene in films of the exotic East.

And that is how blasé tourists speak of Kasba, people who come to have a look at one or other of the tiny streets where Charles Boyer or some other Hollywood hero filmed his great moments. It does not interest them that according to official French statistics 20 to 50 per cent of the children here die before they reach the age of two. It does not interest them to ask why these people live in such shocking conditions. They do not care to burden themselves with tracing the connection between the poverty and the crime record of the inhabitants of Kasba, because the end and the beginning of such investigation must invariably lead to the original culprit — the French colonial authorities.

"Romantic Kasba really takes your breath away," wrote the American paper "Life" in one of its sensational features not long ago. The headline was accompanied by the picture of a tourist, an American millionairess, holding her handkerchief to her nose to protect herself from the stink of Kasba. She was one of the passengers on the luxury cruise steamer *Caronia*, which touched at Algiers on its "grand tour of Africa".

"The 550 passengers paid almost three million dollars for this eighty-day cruise," wrote "Life". That is about £ 750,000. The cheapest ticket cost £ 600, the most expensive £ 5,000, and that covered only the cost of a cabin and meals. These "tourists" each paid a further £ 1,650 for sight-seeing and outings in the ports of call.

Reuter's went to the trouble of calculating the combined wealth of these 550 tourists, and reached the sum of fifty million pounds.

"It was the most colossal outing ever arranged," boasted the American press, and wrote word for word: "The millionaires drove a hard bargain with Arabs selling *burnous*, fezzes, and leather mementoes, as befits American tourists. They bargained just to get a kick out of bringing the price down. One of the woman said as she bought a pair of French binoculars: "I don't care how much it costs as long I can see through it..." Everybody loves Americans as long as they talk like that..."

American "Life" could not paint a more characteristic picture of American tourists, saying in conclusion:

"The Algiers outing was so *aerodynamically* organised to ensure the complete safety of the tourists and to prevent their being pestered. Their guides did not take them into typical Arab homes, but only to carefully chosen Moorish families."

To ensure their complete safety! It was indeed necessary, for the people of Algeria knew very well who stood before them. And the French police took good care to see that none of the tourist-millionaires met with any accident. It would have been very awkward if anything had happened to one of the conductors of that orchestra into which they had incorporated Algeria too, while he was buying, say, an Algerian fez.

Water and desert

In the fertile coastal regions of Algeria you will often see irrigation arrangements. Deep concrete channels bring the sap of life to thousands of weary trees and acres of thirsty gardens and vineyards. They stretch for kilometres by the side of the roads, then disappear to emerge again on the other side. They are the last traces of man's struggle against unequal odds — against sun and sand.

We wanted to see for ourselves this grim struggle which has neither end nor beginning, and so we drove out of Algiers to the south.

We were surrounded by the same panorama as round Blida — everywhere green. All at once deep rocky valleys appeared. And mountains. There was something wrong here. These were no longer the lush green mountains which had accompanied us up to now along the Algerian coast, but burnt, exhausted mountains, grey with age and weariness. The road climbed steeply. On our left rose a perpendicular wall of rock, and below us on the right gaped a deep abyss. In the course of a few kilometres you climb from sea-level to over three thousand three hundred feet. At the bottom of the abyss lies the dried-up bed of a stream. A narrow strip of water gleams in the

middle of the sandy channel which fills up only during the rainy season. But it does not rain in the desert in May. Not until the end of September do the skies open again to water the thirsty earth . . .

Suddenly the endless mountain plateau opens before you.

The desert.

It is not worth while bringing up here the granite blocks which line every Algerian road along the coast. Empty asphalt cans filled with stones and sprayed with whitewash are good enough. It is not wise to invest too much money in the desert . . .

Would you like to form a perfect impression of infinity? If you look at the starry night sky, the stars seem too near. If you look at the sea your eye finds the horizon. But if you drive through the desert at night you slowly lose yourself, you disappear until you are something so infinitely small that you are less than a grain of the sand which endlessly rises before you and mingles with the light of your headlamps. Without stopping, without end and without beginning.

A hundred kilometres is not a great distance when driving through inhabited country.

A hundred kilometres through the desert by night is multiplied by darkness and eternity.

Bou Saada

There are two Bou Saadas.

One is for foreign visitors who want to look at the palm groves, have their photographs taken on a camel, and spend the night in the Transatlantic Hotel before returning to the coast with the consciousness of having seen the Sahara. The other is untouched by civilisation, raw and yet beautiful; Europeans rarely see it. Built of mud bricks, burnt, it lies shimmering in the dry heat wafted down through the palms from the rocky barrier of the Sahara.

We had the chance to see inside one of these homes. We were greeted by a dark, dirty passage, where we had to stand still for a moment to accustom our eyes. Still blinded by the sharp glare of the sun outside the hovel we stumbled over a figure lying huddled across the narrow passage. A foul stream from inside the hovel trickled round his feet.

"That's my brother, he's got the fever," our host threw out as he hurried on. He could not understand our amazement. Here a sick man is not someone to be given extra care and attention. The rest sit below the mud roof weaving a carpet from sheep's wool. If the sick man has the fever and has to lie in the passage, then there are two hands less to work. Nobody hurries here,

and there is no need to find another pair of hands to take his place. If the sick man gets well he will return to their midst; if he dies, he will just give them extra work with the burial . . .

Light enters the dim room through the opening through which admittance is gained to the flat roof, and through the smoke-hole over the open hearth. A group of women and children in tattered rags sit on the floor, carding the sheep's wool with a cardcomb and weaving a carpet on a primitive loom. Clouds of flies are buzzing around.

In May the season ends for the Transatlantic Hotel. All the staff moves away, for the heat of the Sahara would be unbearable for visitors. Only the Arab caretaker in his white turban stays on, and the handful of thin children lose their opportunity for begging alms . . .

Between Bou Saada and Algiers the two main Sahara roads cross. Here stands a French military post, deserted, but still in good condition. It is a refuge for tired pilgrims which is always open, well-provided with fuel and offering a night's shelter. As we came out of its dusty walls an old man came towards us, unshaved, unwashed, wearing the tattered remnants of European dress. We did not know how to make ourselves understood, but he greeted us in pure French. It took us a long time to get over our surprise, for this man who sits in the middle of the desert guarding a deserted military post had a thorough knowledge of what was going on in the world, knew all about the leading statesmen, international conferences and the contents of international agreements. He suddenly began discussing the Czechoslovak-Polish agreement and could even quote the date on which it was signed. You remain silent with admiration, listening to his elegant French and his expert terminology.

"How do I come to know all this?" he asked in surprise. "What else is there for me to do here? I've plenty of time on my hands. I only get bored when I don't get the back papers from the teacher in the next village."

He was quiet for a while.

"Go back home? No, no, I couldn't live without this desert. I would never find such freedom in France."

The Arab world

Unemployment, wages kept down to an unbelievable low level, and exploitation of the broad masses of the Algerian working people affect naturally enough not only the standard of living but working morale and character as well. A foreigner coming suddenly into such conditions or unable

to realise the connection between these factors often therefore draws quite false conclusions from what he sees and is prepared to see in the Arabs nothing but thieves, idlers and fanatical followers of Islam.

In the suburbs of dock downs as well as on the main streets of the towns you can see hordes of ragged men, women and children who are forced to beg because they are hungry. There is not enough work for all. And so they think out various ways of getting hold of money.

In Sidi bel Abbes the innkeeper told us at supper not to go out alone in the unlit streets. On the way from the restaurant we looked for a hotel. While one of us inquired about the possibility of a night's lodging, the other stood guard over the car. Suddenly the door opened and an unknown youth with an impudent gesture began demanding baksheesh and threatening to stay in the car unless he got what he wanted. We were taken aback by this mentality, which we had not met with before. A small tip was no good; the young man put his price up with determination. It took the two of us to get the intruder out of the car, and then we had to make a quick get-away with the Tatra to avoid coming into conflict with the crowd of people which rapidly gathered.

This happened in the seat of the Foreign Legion, where the legionnaires themselves complained to us that they dared not go through the streets of Sidi bel Abbes at night unless they went in groups. Nor is it any wonder, when from Oran or Algiers not far away boats sail for Indochina laden with war material and with formations of that same Foreign Legion, against men fighting for the same independence as the progressive movement in Algeria. The people of Algeria are not used to being treated decently by foreigners in their country, and it is therefore not to be wondered at that they do not try to see any difference between one foreigner and another. And Sidi bel Abbes is one of the most sensitive nerves of Algeria . . .

If you watch Algerian Arabs at work you come to the conclusion that they have all preserved unconsciously something of the hallmark of the patient Arab craftsmen who could spend whole decades playing with one square yard of delicate cobweb decorations in their mosques. It makes no difference whether they are working in the docks, at some craft, driving cars, selling, shunting railway trucks or mending roads. Today these descendants of famous builders are not working on such holy objects, but in docks and on roads, in the marketplace and in the dark recesses of workshops. But they work with the same long-term, you might say at first sight, planned calm, which sometimes brings the hurrying European off his balance.

Driving along the road you suddenly come upon an obstacle in front of you, in the shape of a heap of gravel. You are forced to slow down to a

walking pace and drive right to the edge of the ditch. A group of workmen lying in the ditch on the other side of the road having their dinner watch your careful twisting without a word. The road here is under repair. It occurs to you that they must bring up and rake out twenty such heaps a day, if not fifty. Why couldn't they rake out this particular one before lying down by the roadside to eat their dinner?

If you can act differently from twenty other drivers who might pass this way, and instead of swearing climb out of your car to have a chat with the workmen, you understand that in their place you would probably have done the same.

"Do you know how much they pay us for a day's work, mister?" one of the roadmenders looks at us while he twists a freshly baked pancake between his fingers. "Fifty francs. That's the price of a packet of cigarettes in the town. And anyway — we shall never drive along this road, mister. Have you noticed where the mules and the asses walk? Along the ditch, always along the ditch."

We shall never drive along this road . . .

A mule will go round a heap of gravel a hundred times a day and not mind, thinks the roadmender to himself. If the official in his motor car does not want to go round it, he'd better pay higher wages or get out and rake the gravel out himself.

The people of Algeria are good-natured even in their poverty; they can be merry and will greet you with unfeigned friendliness once they realise that you wish them well.

Only that they rarely meet with foreigners in their country who wish them well; very, very rarely.

Tunisia

The road to the Tunisian border passes through just the same well-blessed land as in the other direction, to Morocco. Once more you see vines, corn, almond trees and orchards of fruit trees. And then suddenly you come upon cork-oak plantations. Along the roadside stand enormous barricades carefully built up of cork-oak bark, rounded as it was stripped off the trunks. If you take a great big piece into your hand, two metres long and about five centimetres thick, your hand flies up in the air because you expected you would hardly manage to lift the cork. It is incredibly light.

Along the road you meet with lorries and trailers loaded with cork. The monstrous loads are four or five metres high, but the chassis springs look as though the trucks were half empty.

Driving from Algeria into Tunisia is exciting. Neither more nor less. But don't imagine that there is shooting going on across the Algerian frontiers or that there are bandits lying in wait above the sharp twists in the road, to send a rock down on your head. Nothing of the sort. Nevertheless it is an adventure to drive through the Algerian night into Tunisia. Beyond the frontier post at La Calle the signposts suddenly stop. You are surprised, because in Morocco and Algeria you had got used to excellent traffic arrangements and clearly marked roads. You suddenly feel as if you were in a country expecting enemy invasion, where all the signposts had been deliberately taken down. The road which appears on the map as the principal road turns into a broken and unrepaired track. You automatically take the second road, although it bends rather far inland. After driving for about ten kilometres you catch sight of the sea gleaming through the thick cork-oak plantations. You have come back to the coast. The broken coastal road gets no better, although it is the only means of communication.

Tunisia is a protectorate, it occurs to you once more, but that is no reason for breaking off all traffic communication with it. After all, it's all French territory. It is, that's true, but the French look at things in a different light. The road is indescribably bad, full of sharp stones. You shudder at the thought that the tyres won't be able to stand it. According to the map you ought to have been at the frontier post of Tabarka long ago. Instead you are perched over sixteen hundred feet above the sea listening to the waves far below you beating against the rocky cliffs. After a long, exciting drive the beam of the Tabarka light-house shines at last between the cliffs.

"Inland there are asphalt roads," the official at the police station answered our question whether all the roads in Tunisia were in such a desperate state. "But if anybody wants to cross the frontier he must be prepared to take risks."

Ruins of two thousand years ago

Driving into Tunis from the west your path is crossed by the massive stone ridge of the Roman aqueduct which brought water into the city which arose on the ruins of proud Carthage.

After two thousand years the giant stone blocks stand piled in masterly fashion one upon the other, the keystones of the high arches still fitting exactly. The pillars of the aqueduct may seem rather heavy compared with the narrow channel along the top, but its very survival is a convincing proof that the Roman builders knew how to suit the proportions of their works to the demand for durability. One link follows another in an endless chain,

all exactly alike. You can imagine the aqueduct is just waiting for water to come pouring along its ridge once more, the water which once upon a time brought life to the city from the distant mountains.

In the shadow of these two-thousand-year-old witnesses to the march of history other ruins rest today. They are considerably younger and certainly nobody will remember them in two thousand years' time. They are shot-up tanks, anti-aircraft guns and military trucks left here by the Wehrmacht as they wrote full stop to the chapter of their African expansion. They remained crushed in the shadow of an earlier empire, almost in the centre of forgotten Carthage. In the first days of May 1943 the German-Italian army streamed through here as it retreated, to put the finishing touches to its fate in the last battle in the trap of Cape Bon. The German generals had plenty of opportunity then to consider the fate of the regime they were serving.

Almost within reach, across an inlet of the sea, were the ruins of Carthage . . .

Curiosity drives you to see for yourself the scene of the famous Punic Wars which were an important landmark in human history — Carthage, which for centuries intimidated the leaders of foreign armies. At the end of a nineteen kilometre long road from Tunis to the north east you will find today the ruins of the city whose wealth and glory once shone like a light-house above the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The thoroughness of the Roman destruction left pitifully little for the archeologists of today, who are still working here to uncover the buried record of history.

“In any case I consider it necessary to destroy Carthage . . .”

This concise programme put forward by Cato was carried out to the last letter, even if three Punic Wars were needed to do it. They put an end to the history of the famous city whose foundation stones were laid by Phoenician settlers from Tyre and Sidon at the beginning of the first century B. C. Of the city built on the ruins of Carthage you will find today only the arena, which has been restored; here the Roman imperators threw helpless human sacrifices to the lions, to keep the people amused and keep their minds off more serious matters.

On a low hill, far from the former Gulf of Carthage, where the proud fleet anchored, stand bare walls with the broken marble pillars and the mosaic floors of what used to be baths. Only the amphitheatre has retained something of its old nobility. The archeologists went to great pains to remove the thousands of tons of sand which covered in their kindness the stage where classical antique dramas were performed. When we came to the spacious amphitheatre of Carthage we found preparations in full swing for a performance of Androcles. The next day the stone blocks of the theatre were

to ring with the echoes of the Comédie Française, after two thousand years of silence.

Centuries ago these walls witnessed scenes of mad destruction which had no parallel in the history of the Ancient World; senseless havoc and the insane urge to destroy everything that might recall the arrogant power of Phoenician Carthage. Before your eyes pass the Roman quinquiremes whose revolutionary technique surprised the galleys of Carthage which were powerful but too slow. In the end it was the *corvus*, the raised gang-plank with a toothed end which was fastened by a beam to the mast, which decided the sea battle between the Romans and the Carthaginians and changed the whole course of the war. Along the *corvus*, whose sharp hooks dug into the decks of the enemy boats as they drew near, the Roman mercenaries poured into the heart of the invincible sea power and wrote the last bloody page of their history . . .

The same marble columns with Corinthian capitals which once upon a time supported the rich architraves of the temples can be found many miles to the south of Tunis, in Kairouan, the holy city of the Muslims.

Soon after their descent here from the east the Arabs in their religious ardour gathered together the remains of Roman and Phoenician buildings from all along the north African coast, and above marble columns from Carthage, Leptis Magna, Sabrata, Cyrene and all the other ruined towns rose the elegant arches of the balconies and mysterious prayer-house of the Great Mosque. More than six hundred wonderful marble columns found in the prayer-house a new function and since the year 669 have been silent witnesses to the fanatical faith of the Muslims, who still come here to bow before the great Prophet with their brows turned towards Mecca.

"Ashadu anna la ilaha illa llahu wa Muhammadun rasulu llahi . . ."

"I believe that there is no other God but Allah and that Mohammed is His Prophet . . ." intones the muezzin six times a day from the balconies of the Great Mosque, calling the faithful to prayer. The holy calm of the great courtyard rings from time to time with the echo of thundering footsteps of military formations returning to their barracks, over whose old-time towers waves the tricolour of France. The most expressive symbol of the age of the Great Mosque are the deep grooves in the marble blocks lining the well in the courtyard. They have been worn by the constant letting down of buckets and today serve to guide the Arabs' hempen ropes just as they did centuries ago.

Tunisia and the French Protectorate

In Morocco the French replaced the Resident M. Labonne, who showed too little energy, by the collaborationist General Juin. They made a similar move on the chess-board of the secret measuring of forces in Tunisia. Here no less a person than the Bey of Tunisia was involved. The inhabitants of Tunisia cannot forget that the French interned the former Bey Montsef and replaced him by the obedient Sidi Mohammed Lamin Pasha. It was one more drop of oil on the flame of discontent smouldering below ground.

Part of the population of Tunisia consider the protectorate to be a transitory form of government and are waiting for the French to change it. According to the programme proclaimed by the leaders of the ever-growing progressive movement, the final aim of Tunisia is political independence. The French themselves are already taking notice of the dangerous political situation and the tension which can be felt on every occasion. They talk and write openly about it.

We could not go as far as the correspondent of the Lyons daily "*Lyon Libre*", who in his desire to get to know the situation in Tunisia thoroughly disguised himself, put on an Arab fez and leather slippers, and attended a meeting of the underground movement. The conclusions he drew from his visit to Tunisia are remarkable, even though dictated by the interests of the French bourgeoisie:

"Unless the French Government takes immediate sensible steps, and not by use of force, in the Arab question in North Africa, the future will look very dangerous for her. It would be unwise to underestimate the importance of the Tunisian progressive movement, which is leading the people towards complete independence. We must not forget that North Africa is developing fast now that France has set her moving. It is up to France to give this development the right direction, unless we want to let the situation end in catastrophe."

Tunisia is far less extensive and far less rich than neighbouring Algeria, and therefore the economic and political tension is most evident in Tunisia, of all three French territories in North Africa. Poverty and hunger are widespread throughout the land; barely 90,000 out of over half a million Tunisian children are able to go to school. Illiteracy remains at the incredibly high figure of 96%. Unemployment is growing and the French government does not know what to do about it. Strikes and demonstrations are getting more frequent, although the colonial police force on the orders of the authorities suppress them brutally.

France is well aware of the irresistible tempo of development in the

former Italian colonies, of which the largest and most important, Libya, lies right at the doorstep of Algeria and Tunisia. That is why at the Paris conference of ministers and at the plenary meetings of the United Nations Organisation France so stubbornly clung to her proposals to leave Libya under international control and hand over part of Libya (Fezzan) to France. The fact that Libya will be given independence — even if only a formal independence — will be another nail in the coffin of French colonial rule in Africa. It will be an immeasurable encouragement to the Tunisian progressive movement in its fight to free the country entirely from the fetters of France.

From time to time the French government attempts to bandage up the open wounds of starving Tunisia. The press is then full of news items about boatloads of grain for the inhabitants of Tunisia. They are Danaidean gifts which are a clear proof of the hypocrisy of the government's policy. Grain is taken from the starving people of Algeria to be "given" to the starving people of Tunisia. The fact that its value is but a ridiculous fraction of the enormous profits of the colonial exploiters is never to be seen reported in the bombastic donatory news items.

While we were in Tunisia the French authorities refused permission to unload large quantities of grain sent by King Farouk of Egypt to "his starving fellow-faithful" in Tunisia and in Tripolitania. In Tripoli the British authorities agreed to accept this offer of help, while the French returned the 300 tons of wheat to Egypt "for reasons of prestige". As a matter of fact the Egyptian *fellahin* needed this grain just as badly as their fellow-faithful in Tunisia or Tripolitania, but they never got to know that their grain was a mere pawn in the Arab League's political game on the extensive chess-board of Mediterranean interests.

All these problems which cause the French Government ever increasing head-aches provoke but caustic remarks from the Americans, who make use of these internal political difficulties to instal themselves even more firmly in North Africa. Even before the war had ended an agreement was signed between the American Department of Commerce and the French High Council for Supply concerning the American products which could be imported by French North Africa after the war. The Americans knew very well why they wanted such an agreement; as early as 1946 the imports of American goods into Algeria reached three times the figure for 1937.

For the French it is a sad thing to realise that the American capitalists are penetrating their territory by means of precisely the same methods that France herself used to gain her influential position in Africa and to bring the various territories into her colonial empire.

The subjugation of Tunisia began in 1863, when French banks made use of the financial difficulties in which the Bey of Tunisia found himself to force upon him a loan of 39 million francs on exceptionally hard terms. The banks retained nearly ten million francs to cover incidental expenses and about twenty million was swallowed up by the payment of intermediaries and other fantastic items. In the end Tunisia got a mere five and a half million francs, but had to bind herself to repay 63 million francs in the course of fifteen years. Before two years were up the Bey was again forced to beg for a loan which brought into the hands of French bankers all the tax revenue of the country. In another two years French diplomacy was able to write up among its colonial victories the achievement of complete financial and political control over Tunisia.

The French remember this very well.

And so they are beginning to feel more and more uncomfortable as the presence of the Americans in their arena gets more and more obtrusive.





Chapter Three

A LAND BURNT BY SUN AND WAR

Driving out of Tunis towards the east you are directed from the city to the coast road by a gleaming white signpost ten feet high:

<i>Sfax</i>	<i>269 km.</i>	<i>Tripoli</i>	<i>761 km.</i>
<i>Ben Gardane</i>	<i>558 km.</i>	<i>Cairo</i>	<i>3,086 km.</i>

The distances quoted shoot up like bids for a rare Rembrandt in an auction. These are distances which make a European's head swim.

At the end of this grey strip of asphalt which winds with tireless persistence over the furnace-heat of the sands gleams the vision of the white minarets of Cairo.

When in 1940 German and Italian generals bent over the map of North Africa an even more tempting picture rose before their eyes, however — that of Suez, the second key to the Mediterranean safe. They were only too aware that every ton of supplies for the Italian units pouring from Abyssinia northwards into Sudan and eastwards and southwards into British Somaliland must sail down the Suez canal. France had been beaten to her knees and Goebbels' loudspeakers echoed the intoxication of Compiègne.

The desert and the war

In September 1940 Mussolini's general Graziani with an army of 200,000 men opened an offensive against the British in Egypt. The eyes of the world turned towards Africa and maps of Libya and its neighbour Egypt disappeared like magic from European shops. Graziani did not stop until he reached Sidi Barrani, 140 kilometres from Marsa Matruh, where the British were waiting for him. They made good use of the dusty enemy's unexpected stop for rest and attacked him in December 1940. They drove him far into the interior of Cyrenaica, to El Agheila, almost a thousand kilometres away from the original positions.

Then there appeared on the scene General Rommel, equipped with material which had been gathered long before in the hinterland of Tripolitania. He started his lightening campaign which gained him the pretentious title of "Africanus".

The English, whose attention had meantime been distracted to events in Greece and Crete, retreated before Rommel's superior forces on to Egyptian soil again, to the Halfaya pass, leaving the garrison of Tobruk in the enemy's rear defending itself stubbornly. That was in May 1941, a few weeks before Hitler attacked the Soviet Union.

Rommel's breath was giving out. He needed reinforcements for the attack on Suez, but he waited in vain. The Nazis threw all their forces into the "blitz" offensive in the east. With the opening of the New Year 1942 the British tried a second counter-offensive, but this time they did not hold on in El Agheila for long. From Tobruk, where the front finally settled down, with reserves which he had had difficulty in getting together, Rommel launched the third and last Axis offensive. After a terrible battle on June 13th 1942, when the British lost 230 tanks in a single day, it looked as though their days in North Africa were numbered. The head of the German panzer column reached El Alamein, sixty miles from Alexandria.

Rommel set off for Berlin to give the "Führer" a personal report of his war successes in North Africa. That was how Goebbels' propaganda machine described his journey. He of course forbore to mention that the petrol tanks and the reserves of ammunition in Rommel's tanks had given out at El Alamein. Rommel went to ask for reinforcements and supplies. Just then, however, Hitler's High Command were desperately squeezing their last reserves to patch up the cracking Stalingrad front. To this they sacrificed Rommel's fate and that of his African corps; to this they sacrificed too the last crazy hopes of conquering Suez and the shortest route to India. They realised that on the battlefield of Stalingrad would be decided not only the fate and the

prestige of their armies, but also the fate of Africa, Suez, the route to India and the final outcome of the war.

Meanwhile in El Alamein the British were gathering together all the reserves they had in Africa and the Middle East. On October 23rd 1942 Marshal Montgomery launched an offensive which proved to be the first British victory since the Battle of Britain. In the course of a fortnight the Eighth Army reached El Agheila, the furthest point of each of the preceding offensives. After Rommel's front had fallen to pieces there was nothing for it but hurried flight to the Tunisian frontier. The fall of Tripoli in January 1943 sealed the fate of Hitler and Mussolini in Africa.

Great Britain announced to world her first victory on dry land. Victory over one fraction of the Axis armies, which on the eastern front would have been lost like a drop in the ocean; an army which was stranded without petrol and without supplies, against all that Great Britain could mobilise from all corners of the Empire from the British Isles to Cape Town, India and Australia. It was not so much a case of substituting for the long-promised and still unrealised second front but of creating a base for the attack on the "soft underbelly of Europe", to quote Churchill's own words.

Driving through places which were the scene of furious tank battles a few years ago, you are overcome by a feeling of distress. A hundred and fifty kilometres beyond Tunis the olive groves grow thinner, lining the road on both sides and carrying on an unequal battle with the desert sands. For a few tens of kilometres you still see thirteen foot high cactuses, and then even these disappear. The sad, straight lines of drooping olive trees stand in the infinity of the desert. They stretch for kilometres, their yellow leaves withered by drought and covered with a film of sand. Then all at once they get even thinner, visibly getting weaker until they disappear altogether in the ocean of sand. And then you can see nothing from horizon to horizon but sand, sand across which the ribbon of the road cuts a straight line.

In this comfortless scene man crazed by war has left profound traces. You see them for the first time beyond Gabes, an enchanting oasis before you reach the Tunisian-Libyan border. Here are mountains of empty ammunition cases, burnt-out wrecks of planes, tanks and anti-aircraft guns. Hand grenades all over the place. Thousands of unexploded mines. And then again rust and glass splinters, shot-up trucks, empty petrol cans lying about, and old tins.

Not far from the road gleams the deadly white of the crosses on soldiers' graves. The silent procession of names is linked by a single date: March 23rd, 1943. That day the final desperate battle was fought here, on the Mareth line. This is the first of countless military cemeteries scattered over

the yellow, cynically silent plains of the Libyan desert. We drove to the edge of the road, and all at once the car settled down on the back left wheel on the melting asphalt.

"A puncture!"

"The first puncture — and it had to happen just here!"

A burning wind, the notorious Tripolitanian *ghibli*, blows in from the desert; thousands of grains of sand prick your face and your hands bared to get the foreign body out of the rubber tyre.

A nail?

Oh, no. A grenade splinter, which had waited until now to perform its task — and all that was needed to undo its work was a little current from the accumulator and a rubber patch. Years ago it might have meant digging yet another hollow by the roadside and yet another cross might stand gleaming in the desert today

The picture of destruction accompanies you right from the Mareth line almost to Tripoli, the capital. And even there your tired gaze has no rest. Tripoli harbour is still blocked by dozens of sunken boats, German torpedo boats by the side of American Liberty ships. But even more of them lie at rest beneath the level of the sea whose waves slowly tear the rusty wrecks to pieces beneath the wonderful palm groves of the Tripoli shore.

th. N. 10
A change of masters

Over four hundred years ago — July 25th 1510 — the harbour of Tripoli presented a busy sight. That day 120 ships appeared bearing a garrison of 15,000 Spanish soldiers and 3,000 Italians.

It did not take them long to occupy the wealthy city, for the new master had known what to expect. The Moroccan traveller Al Ayshi, who had visited Tripolitania a short time before, wrote of a rich land whose inhabitants had forgotten how to use weapons during the long period of peace and quiet they had enjoyed. The crews of the Christian ships which came from Spain for their precious loads were surprised by the epicurism of the Moorish merchants of Tripoli. During one of the banquets given by a wealthy Tripoli merchant in honour of his Spanish guests a rare variety of melon was served, but the host could not find in his whole house a knife good enough to be used to cut it.

On their return the sailors told the King of Spain of this incident. His Catholic Majesty was always willing to consider expanding the Spanish Empire when he thought it might bring more cash into the depleted royal coffers.

But the rule of the Spaniards did not last long. Their place was taken by the Turks, who ruled until the beginning of this century. The Italian occupation was not nearly so easy as that of Spain had been. From 1911 the fate of Libya was linked with the name of Italy. A bitter fight against the Tripolitanian Arabs and the brutal "pacification" of the new Italian colony began an era which took for its pattern the empire of the Roman Caesars two thousand years before.

The Italians were not left long in peace to strengthen their position in their new colony. The first world war turned their attention to European battlefields.

Not until the fifteen years preceding the flaring up of the second world conflagration was Tripolitania stamped with the deep seal of Mussolini's fascist plans for expansion. The new colony played an important part in these plans. From an economic point of view it was nothing but a bottomless pit which swallowed billions of lira every year, but Mussolini saw in it a jumping-off ground for conquest of other, more profitable parts of the African continent. In his chimaera plans the Mediterranean Sea bore the name *Mare nostro*, "Our Sea". It was to become an Italian pond on whose African shores an important military base for future operations grew up.

Even the Tripoli of today, which has suffered the ravages of war, surprises you after the hundreds of kilometres driving through the desert, like the mirage of Fata Morgana. The wide modern streets are lined with fine buildings, with architecturally pure facades. Elegant palms are reflected from the asphalt roads along the coast, and the streets are lined with red, white and pink oleanders. There are slender obelisks bearing the symbol of the Roman wolf suckling Romulus and Remus. The Viceroy's residence would not look out of place in any European capital. Before the battlements of the ancient Turkish fortress, on acres of land wrested from the sand-dunes, modern suburbs have grown up. Only twenty years ago there was nothing here but tents where nomad Arabs sold camel meat and sheep's wool just as they do today in distant Suk El Jumaa.

In old Tripoli of course nothing has changed. Beyond the walls of the Turkish fortress one-storied huts still huddle, their inhabitants living in the same dirt, poverty and ignorance as twenty years ago. Today large *Out of bounds* notices forbid members of the British Occupation Forces to enter these parts of the town, for the little Arab streets do not seem clean and safe enough to the military authorities.

Modern Tripoli today, as always, is the home of those who have seized the government of the country and managed to get into their hands the administration of the colony and its rich trade.

Flight from an overcrowded peninsula

We talked to some of the older settlers, who came to Libya long before the Fascist regime was set up in Italy.

An elderly Greek who has lived over a quarter of a century in Libya told us with a pained smile, which expressed both scorn and sympathy, about the Blackshirts, the flags, the drums of the Balilla and the *passo romano*. About touching, film-worthy scenes of Mussolini being welcomed on the Piazza d'Italia by the Arab population, of the farce enacted almost on the very spot where years before the finest sons of Libya were executed publicly by the dozen for having taken arms to defend their country against the invader.

The young Italians who were born and brought up in the colony, however, present a picture of complete confusion. They hate the Germans because hand in hand with them they lost the war — and lost the African colony in which they were born. They hate the English for having occupied “their” Libya. They hate the Arabs who are beginning to ask for their own back. These Italians, brought up in the Balilla, cannot understand that their aggressive war was not an unlucky accident, but that it was the culmination of imperialistic efforts.

We saw with our own eyes what the Italians who fled from starvation in the overcrowded peninsula had created. Libya promised them neither easy riches nor comfort without work. Steel windmills rose out of the burning desert and from hundreds of feet below the earth artesian wells bubbled up. Instead of sand dunes wide vineyards spread along the shore, olive groves and orchards of date palms, orange trees and peaches, vegetable gardens and plantations of ground nuts. New villages grew up, the hope of the unemployed from southern Italy.

These many oases, literally torn from the desert by the hands of simple people, did not of course belong to those who had created them. Estate and loan banks had ensured them for themselves by longterm credits. It was not for the sake of the workers and peasants that everything was done; Mussolini needed hard-working hands in Libya to create out of nothing a food-supplying base for his aggressive army of the future. In his plans he did not want to have to reckon with his armies being dependent on supplies of food brought across a sea ruled on two sides by the navy and the naval bases of Great Britain.

It took over ten years for the desert to yield its first fruits. Then the Italian dictator undertook the last of his strategic schemes . . .

A hundred and twenty degrees in the shade

Up to 1935 there was no land communication between Casablanca and Cairo. The asphalt main road ended in Misurata, a few dozen kilometres east of Tripoli, and from there only a dusty track led towards the east, passable only in the dry season and with great difficulty. Along the shores of the Gran Sirte there was absolutely no means of communication. Under such conditions the movements of military supplies would be paralysed in case of war.

This was the motive which drove them to create in less than two years a basis for military action.

Today a wide asphalt road stretches from the frontiers of Tunisia to those of Egypt, a distance of 1,822 kilometres. In some places it has suffered war damage, but so far the British military authorities in Libya have not repaired a single yard of it. Once the building was completed fast cars on this coastal highway could drive at 300 kilometres an hour. Bends were a rarity in this terrain.

The whole road was built at a feverish speed. The first trench was dug in Tripolitania on October 15th 1935, and three months later work started on the Cyrenaica sector. Millions of cubic metres of sand had to be removed, the unstable foundation strengthened; not only cement and asphalt, but workmen, food and drinking water had to be transported from far-off ports. Work went on with the temperature at a hundred and twenty degrees in the shade. Dozens of artesian wells were bored; workmen's quarters and canteens sprang up like mushrooms.

At the height of building operations 12,000 workers were employed on the road. The Italians calculated that four and a half million ten-hour days were worked here in less than two years. And from 1937 onwards the whole of the North African coast from Casablanca to Alexandria was linked by one long road of six thousand kilometres. This longdistance highway only two years after it was finished became the scene of senseless destruction which it was, in fact, built to facilitate.

The Italians knew how to make the best use of this vast terrain as flat as a table, not far from the capital of Tripolitania. They built a modern race track here with modern grandstands of reinforced concrete for 16,000 spectators.

Today it echoes emptily. We first caught sight of this sports stadium, which once seethed with excitement, on a clear moonlit night. The slim, elegant facade with its spiral entrance steps, flooded by moonlight, created the same melancholy impression as the dead amphitheatre of El Djem, a

survival of another, older empire, whose past glory is recalled only by the pictures on Tunisian postage stamps. It was the exciting games of gladiators that drew crowds to the stone tribunes of El Djem; and it was steel Mercedes and Auto Union cars, together with the names of Caracciola, Lang and Nuvolari, that drew thousands of spectators to the grandstands of the Tripoli race track later.

Here too the military purpose of the motor race track remained a hidden secret. Here German and Italian designers of military vehicles followed carefully the performance of racing cars. The high temperature of the air and the sun-burned race track, as well as the microscopic grains of sand always quivering in the air, created ideal conditions for Hitler's and Mussolini's military advisers to test out in peace and quiet the performance of the air filters and the cooling of motors and tyres which would soon be exposed to the same conditions in battle.

Three days of murder and plunder

After the war ended this former Italian colony, which is roughly fourteen times the area of Czechoslovakia, remained under British military rule. According to international agreement it was to remain in British hands until such time as a definite decision was reached as to the fate of all the Italian colonies in Africa.

This atmosphere of transientness and uncertainty has left its mark on the life of the whole of Libya. Not until two years after the occupation did the British remove the enormous equestrian statue of Mussolini from before the fort of Tripoli. On the street-corners in Tripoli plates bearing such names as Marshal Balbo, Count Ciano, Marshal Graziani, Minister Volpi and King Victor Emmanuel III remained unchanged. Nor did the British go to the trouble of removing the name-plates at the bus stops, where the posts are still topped by the lictors' fasces.

From public buildings the pretentious names of fascist organisations and institutions look down at you. A few steps from the shore still stands among the palms and oleanders a name-plate bearing the words *Via Pierino del Piano — Martire fascista*. The names of the "fascist martyrs" have long ago vanished from Italy, but they remain to this day in the land whose fate has been entrusted to British hands.

You meet a funeral procession, and people stand still to pay their last respects to the dead. By raising their hats? Oh, no! By raising their right hand smartly in the fascist salute. This was how they greeted the Duce years

ago, when he drove through the streets of Tripoli to address his African subjects from the castle battlements.

There is no money being invested in Libya. Not because there is nothing to invest in — the land is as thirsty for water and artificial manures as it ever was. The tracks left by thousands of tanks and military vehicles on the asphalt roads grow bigger and deeper. Dozens of boats lie sunk and rusting in the harbours and hinder free navigation. Thousands of unexploded mines still lie beneath the desert sands and cause loss of human life as well as losses in the flocks of the nomad Berber shepherds.

The olive trees which stood deep in the desert on guard against the unstable dunes are drying up and thinning their ranks. The British sell them to Arab merchants. The orchards and the protective belts of eucalyptus trees are slowly changing into heaps of smouldering charcoal. You suddenly realise where all the charcoal comes from that you see Arabs selling every day in the streets of Tripoli, supplied by the kilogramme to private homes and to cafés.

There is no telephone line between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. The copper wires torn by bombing from the air have been sold by the ton to Egypt by the British military authorities. "A small advance" on reparations. It would be difficult to find a more drastic example of thoughtless management of a country entrusted to one's care.

"Why should we invest money here?" a high official in the British military office in Tripoli will say to you. "We've got enough to worry about, paying our debts to America. And any way," he is silent for a moment, "can you guarantee that Libya will remain ours?"

The British certainly do not behave in Tripoli like responsible managers of the country entrusted to their care. They do not even behave as they do in their own colonies, where they plan their exploitation over a long period. In Libya they act like a temporary tenant who tries to squeeze as much as he can out of the land he has rented even if he leaves it a desert.

In November 1945 serious disturbances broke out in Tripoli. It was shortly after the Americans had asked the British to issue 100,000 immigration permits for Jews to enter Palestine. At that time disturbances broke out at many points along the Mediterranean coast simultaneously. There had never been such bloody clashes in Tripoli as took place in November 1945. The pogrom organised by Arabs against the Jews began simultaneously throughout the whole territory of Tripolitania. In the town of Tripoli itself the mass murder and plunder lasted three full days. The Jews lost over a hundred and twenty victims and the Arabs lost two men. Normal life came to a stop. There was no drinking water. The bakeries did not work. The shops were

shut. Everywhere there was confusion and uncertainty, together with fears that the murderous attacks might spread to the Italian quarter as well.

Not a single British soldier was to be seen in the streets of Tripoli during those three days. The whole garrison complete with armoured cars remained in their barracks. But a week before the bloody disturbances began hundreds of emergency beds were prepared in the British hospital.

During these same few days Jews were murdered 5,000 kilometres away, in the Middle East, where the British ruled.

We did not want to believe the horrifying details of those three nights of St. Bartholomew, which were only too reminiscent of the barbarities of the Nazis in their concentration camps. But we received confirmation from Italians and Jews alike, as well as from Arabs. Nobody knew why it had all happened, not even Arabs who had taken part.

Only the British had "foreseen" these bloody events, left them free rein, and pointed out with satisfaction that "it so happened" that pogroms took place wherever Arabs and Jews lived side by side and where the administration "happened" to be in British hands. And "it so happened" that just at that time the British Government was trying to prove to the Americans that Jews have no business among the Arabs.

A mill-wheel without water

In the thirties there was work enough to be had in Libya, money to be made and spent. The streets of Tripoli could not cope with the streams of immigrants disgorged daily by boats from the peninsula. The town spread with a mushroom growth. Even today the rough concrete ceilings in the restaurants, with their naked girders, remind you of the speed with which the town grew.

You can find luxury restaurants, too, with terraces over the sea and dance floors. The Meari Hotel, built on pillars over the water, is shaped like a giant steamer. On this elegant show-piece the Italians felt really comfortable, doing their best to spend a pleasant evening after the long day's sweating in the hot breath of the *ghibli*, the south wind blowing from the desert.

From the dance floor built out over the sea, a tunnel leading under the gleaming asphalt road brings you to the enchanting other part of the Meari Hotel. Here you find shady courtyards with mosaic wells and playing fountains, clusters of acacia blooms, the drowsy scent of oleanders and comfortable little rooms breathing a pleasant cleanliness. The picture it presents

would have been quite as suitable for the cover-picture of road-maps of Libya as the attractive smiling Arab girl standing on the concrete strip of the coast highroad. Quite as suitable as the silhouettes of date palms and the monumental arch on the original frontier between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, where Mussolini had his name engraved "for all eternity".

Today Libya reminds you of a mill-wheel where the race has dried up. If you pay a sixty lira bill in a shop, the shopkeeper has to run out to get change for a hundred lira note. In the cash drawer he hasn't got a single nickel lira. This is no exception. There is no current capital anywhere. People live from day to day, from hand to mouth. No Italian table was ever without wine — the wine which used to run in streams here. Today you can see the hotel-keeper running to the shop over the way before he serves dinner, in order to buy the three bottles of cheap wine his guests will drink at midday. There is no money to buy supplies.

A queue of hungry unemployed workmen stand with mug in hand in front of the soup-kitchen. Worried faces, shabby clothes, uncertain and embarrassed looks. The picture once so familiar in Europe in the thirties has come alive again in the streets of Tripoli. Here a few hundred wrecked souls are waiting for a steamer to take them to Italy. There are former dock-workers among them, motor mechanics, cannery workers, peasants from the desert oases now drying up, cement workers and drivers who transported the cans of asphalt needed for the anthill of the Libya highroad. Some of them came here twenty-five years ago, full of youthful enthusiasm and hopes for a happy life. Others found work here after years of unemployment in Europe. In a few days they will all return to their homeland at the government's expense — ageing, tired, disillusioned. How many of them realise the true reason for their inglorious return?

Before the war an Italian workman earned 600 lira a month in Libya; an office-worker 1000 lira. For a two-room flat he paid 50 to 150 lira a month. For five or seven lira he could get a good meal. For 150 to 300 lira he could be dressed from head to foot. A seat in the cinema cost one lira twenty — today it costs thirty. A meal in a moderate restaurant costs 60 lira and in a good one at least double that price.

The difference between the wages paid to Italians and to Arabs was never so great in Tripolitania as elsewhere in the African colonies. Today an Arab workman who slaves all day loading hundredweight sacks in the docks earns 60 lira. But the official price of a kilogramme of sugar is 95 lira and the price of a kilogramme of butter is 450 lira. And Arabs are not admitted to the soup-kitchens. They are not left much choice — go without a home, or steal. You cannot let yourself starve.

The results of both extremes can be seen at every step. Poverty, dirt, people who sleep every night on the pavements. Criminality has reached unheard-of proportions. If you leave your car standing on the street while you go to have dinner you will be unable to move half an hour later — the battery has been stolen. Armed hold-ups of cars on the main roads are increasing. The police are powerless, because the highwaymen share their spoils with the starving Arab population.

When the fruit and vegetables ripen in the few remaining orchards gangs of starving people come from the interior of the country; not even the numerous watchmen can do anything against them.

Under such conditions it sounds like an incredible fairytale to hear old Italian settlers say that before the war it was a common habit to leave houses in the towns and in the desert oases unlocked even for weeks of absence. Not only the ordinary settlers were honest, but the nomad shepherds as well. Nothing was ever stolen.

You suddenly realise that something has gone wrong with all these people. The Arabs here would never have touched anybody else's property, but today poverty has driven them to theft. But it is also driving them to consider the cause of their terrible situation today. They know for sure, now, that it was the aggressive Italians who turned their homeland upside down. Out of their poverty and suffering is growing hatred for everything foreign, for all those who came into their country to colonise, "civilise", and "pacificate", and who in the end dragged the whole country into the destruction of war.

And an eighteen-year-old unemployed Italian who wanders about the streets begging for cigarettes springs this question on you:

"Is that a new Czechoslovak car? Why, you've nationalised, haven't you?"

We did not see what the two things had to do with each other at first.

"No factory could produce a thing like that after nationalisation!"

This young Italian had explained clearly enough what he found so surprising about our car. Our Tatra was the object of general admiration in Tripoli, but a lad trained by the fascist Balilla to hate everything socialist could not understand that nationalised industry in Czechoslovakia was increasing its productivity.

After talking to him for half an hour we realised what a difficult task it was going to be to re-educate some young fanatics blinded by long years of propaganda in the Balilla. In spite of the misery of his present life he would not admit that for the same work he ought to be given the same pay as an "inferior" Arab. He does not believe in real democracy. He cannot imagine a state without a Duce or coloured workers without a white boss.

A look of horror comes into his eyes when he hears about factory councils and national committees. The system which educated him disappointed him. But this young fascist is prepared to blame it all on unhappy fate, on chance — and even on insufficient fanatical ardour among the Duce's supporters, for long after the war has been lost Mussolini's halo still remains sacred to him.

These young Italians must have the blinkers dragged from their eyes; they must be told the truth about the basis and the aims of the regime under which they grew up. Their intoxication with modern weapons must be replaced by love for work, love for people and faith in people. Fascist nationalism must be driven out of them, fed as it is on racial hatred and hatred for other nations; it must be replaced by the healthy patriotism of men building up their own land.

They, too, will need to hate.

To hate all who rattle their sabres and cast longing glances at other people's property.

Twenty-four hours

In many ways Tripoli resembles other North African ports. A European element has penetrated into the life of Islam just as it has in Casablanca, Rabat, Oran, Algiers, or Sfax, and struck deep roots. Outwardly however that bright atmosphere of oriental life which you can feel beneath the surface just as you can touch, see and hear it as soon as you meet it — this atmosphere has still been preserved. The sound background to life in Tripoli is inimitable.

"Ashadu anna la ilaha illa llahu wa Muhammadun rasulu llahi . . .

The lilting melody falls into the lightening twilight. It is five o'clock. The high singsong of the muezzin's cry goes from tone to tone, trembling in delicate throaty tremulos, and suddenly dies away as if it had fallen from the balcony of the minaret. "I believe there is no other God but Allah, and Mohammed is His Prophet . . ." The city is still sleeping, but the muezzin is already calling the believers to the first prayers, *fadjir*. And then quiet settles down again over the roofs of the town.

"Ovaaaaa, ovaaaaa, ovaaaaa . . ."

As the sun rises a man's voice is heard from the street, calling in the whining tone of a baby. "Ovaaaa, ovaaa," you hear it more and more clearly until a thunderous "ovaaa" bursts out just under your window, to grow weaker and weaker again until it dies away a few houses further on. The man carrying an enormous basket of eggs on his head and gesticulating with his

hands repeats his whining call with mechanical regularity. He is followed by the man selling charcoal, the vegetable man, the poultry seller; their sing-song calls are interrupted by the braying of donkeys.

"I believe there is no other God . . ." You look at your watch. Just eight o'clock, the same as yesterday and tomorrow. The muezzin is calling the faithful for the second time, standing beneath the slender minaret; he calls them to render thanks to Allah with the prayer *sabah*.

"Corriééérííí . . . Corriééérííí . . ." the sharp voice of the Arab newspaper boy with the morning edition cuts across the muezzin's lament. The seven-year-old lad in ragged trousers, with his fan of printed paper streaming in the wind, trots along without stopping so as not to miss his daily customers. A second "Corriéríí" is heard half an hour later, but it is a wilting, hopeless cry. The first newsboy's competitor is returning by a round-about way to the printers, in the hope of selling another paper or two and saving a few cents. By this time the ice-cream men's bells can be heard from the street, the men selling ice go by, and the knife-grinders with their creaking wheels.

The buzz of the street is interrupted suddenly by the strange rhythm of a large and a small drum; the sound comes slowly nearer. The five-four beat is intertwined with an oriental melody played on a wood instrument with a sound like that of the oboe. The melody ranges within six tones; at first it seems terribly monotonous, but as you listen you catch slight variations in trills and tones. Only the basic melody drags on unchanged like a firm thread.

The music sounds even more clearly, and round the corner come four carriages decorated with coloured ribbons and with the green flags of the Prophet. An Arab wedding. A crowd of children and grown-ups run shouting after the procession. Two or three taxi-drivers wait impatiently with their fingers pressed on the horn, until the noisy throng disappears and they can thread their way through the litter of carts, donkeys and mules which has blocked the street. Meanwhile below our windows the Italian restaurant owner is whistling loudly, stopping only to greet a familiar customer with his stereotyped: "Buon giorno, come sta . . ."

"... *mmadun rasulu llahi*," the pithy Italian mingles with the plaintive Arabic of the muezzin whose tremolo calls the faithful to the third prayer, *duhr*. You automatically without thinking look at your watch and set it at one o'clock, for the muezzin is even more punctual than Big Ben in London.

After midday the street grows quiet for two hours as if touched by an enchanted wand. The afternoon siesta is a mysterious curse which works once every twentyfour hours like a categorical imperative. The sun is at the zenith.

On the stroke of three the monotonous tapping of a hammer sounds from the little ground-floor shop opposite. The Arab goldsmith has got up from his afternoon nap.

Then again the thunder of drums crashes on the air, three times as loud as in the morning: another Arab wedding, but a more pretentious one this time, with many carriages, many wedding guests, many spectators. Afternoon weddings are for the rich. Only the monotonous music is the same . . .

At five o'clock the muezzin is heard again, for the fourth time — like an alarm-clock waking those who like a long siesta. It is time for *asr*, the afternoon prayer. The seller of figs must have got his repentance over at eight o'clock in the morning for the whole day in advance, for he doesn't mind a bit that his noisy cries offering half-mouldy wares cut across the muezzin calling to the faithful.

In the evening a dry sound as of hail falls on the street — the rhythm of a march, drums, whistles and childish voices. Memory recalls the hordes of little Hitlerites in the streets of Prague, with knives in their belts. And a company of young Arabs does indeed appear in the street; under the patronage of the British military authorities they have taken over the old tradition of the Italian Balilla. Arab lads in uniform, with drums and a rousing march, for all the world like a Germanic march. For whom do the occupation authorities foster such a military spirit in these dark-skinned boys?

After sunset the muezzin appears on the scene again: *maghrub*, the fifth, the evening prayer, and next to the last. From the open windows of Arab and European flats and from behind the bead curtains at the café doors comes a rich medley of sound — American jazz, the lilting melody of Arab songs, the European programme from the Bari transmitter with the voice of Benjamin Gigli. And through it all a hoarse gramophone tries to drown the flood of noise with the creaking sound of a Strauss waltz played ten times over every day all the year round. Compared with the streets of Tripoli of an evening the St. Matthew's Fair is a haven of peace and rest.

Ten o'clock. From an open cinema not far away sound the blaring fanfares which precede the Arab newsreel, sent every fortnight from Cairo. Then comes the sixth and last appearance of the muezzin, singing to the faithful that the time has come for *asbi*, the night confession. The last words are drowned in a rising flood of sound from the Egyptian newsreel, probably a football match or a political meeting in Cairo. There is silence for ten seconds and then a jazz tune brings before the eyes of the Tripoli Arabs the latest American coloured film starring Deanna Durbin. Somewhere at the other end of the street in another open-air cinema a competitor tries to drown the first film, but in vain. Deanna Durbin is leading.

Towards midnight the waves of sound from this Tripoli Babylon die down somewhat. And suddenly somewhere beyond the town a full-voiced cock begins to crow. At midnight. A hallucination? Five minutes later hundreds of cocks all over Tripoli start convincing you it was no nightmare. To your horror you realise that almost every flat roof in Tripoli boasts a hen-run. At twenty minutes past twelve all the sounds of Tripoli give way to a chorus performance by the cocks.

All at once a childish voice is heard crying in the street. It is joined by a second, a third, a fifth — and in five minutes there is an unimaginable row going on under our windows. In the shadow of the houses, along balconies, gutter-pipes and terraces creep the shadows of dozens of Tripoli cats. Their crescendo drags out for half an hour, culminates in a few duels between jealous tomcats — and everything grows quiet again. Only for a while, of course, for ten minutes which you can spend profitably listening to Arabic and learning all manner of coarse expressions, provided you don't mind one of the participants being the Arab woman from the house over the way. Perhaps her nocturnal performance is her way of making up for her all-day imprisonment behind the bars of her house-arrest.

Round about two o'clock exhilarated voices ring through the streets. Carriage after carriage, ten . . . twenty . . . military uniforms. After nine o'clock in the evening alcoholic drinks may only be sold to members of the occupation forces, and so the cabmen with their lame mares and their broken-down carriages make a few lira at least during the night hours, until the soldiers cool their hot heads on the promenade before returning to barracks.

At three o'clock the cocks begin their repeat performance. At four the belated tomcats join in out of sympathy.

And an hour before sunrise the circle is completed.

"Ashadu anna la ilaha illa llahu wa Muhammadun rasulu llahi . . .

A theatre for 5,000 spectators on the edge of the desert

Not more than a quarter of a century ago the slow restoration of two ancient cities which had been resting for over a thousand years under deep drifts of sand on the Tripolitanian shores was begun. The names of Sabrata and Leptis Magna are by far less well known than that of Carthage, but today, when the buried secret of these two towns has been dragged from the desert, Carthage retreats far into the background before their luxurious wealth.

Together with the ancient town of Oea, all of which remains on the soil.

of present-day Tripoli being the pretentious Marcus Aurelius arch, Leptis Magna and Sabrata formed a famous constellation of three towns which gave its name to the whole land: Tripolitania. Both towns had been founded, like Carthage, by Phoenician traders, and served them as ports of call on their long voyages, concentrating all the caravan trade which brought from the interior of Africa immeasurable quantities of ivory, gold, precious spices, slaves and later on wild beasts which found their way into the circuses of Rome. After the fall of Carthage all three cities passed into the hands of the King of Numidia, whose kingdom was recognised by the Romans in return for the help he had given them against the Carthaginians.

In the year 111 B. C. civil war broke out in Numidia and seriously threatened both Sabrata and Leptis Magna. At their request military aid was sent from Rome, and this marked the beginning of the rapid growth of both cities.

The Romans realised the importance of North Africa and opened their coffers wide, pouring life into the downtrodden Numidian settlements. The old Phoenician towns became elegant Roman cities with temples, theatres, marketplaces, libraries, swimming pools and comfortable houses. The people of these towns were considered allies rather than subject peoples. Under the Emperor Trajan this country even became an indivisible and equal part of the Empire. Its inhabitants were given the rights of Roman citizens as a token of recognition.

Walking today through the uncovered ruins of Leptis Magna, which boasted 80,000 inhabitants in its most flourishing days, this ancient Roman town fills you with amazement. Were it not for the ravages of the destructive hand of Islam which scattered its ruins along the whole of the North African coast, Leptis Magna would have been preserved under the balsam of the African sands as the most perfect example of Roman architecture. No other town in the Roman Empire could boast of a forum built with such wealth as that of Leptis Magna; only the Fora of Rome itself surpassed it. On an area of tens of thousands of square metres rose a forest of stone, a forest of richly decorated pillars with massive architraves, peristyles, arches carved with the head of Medusa and pilasters of red Egyptian granite. Even today the supporting pillars reft of their inlaid wooden ceilings testify to the tremendous size of the basilica.

As well as the big open swimming pools there was a vast public baths in a building which also contained various other tanks to serve different purposes. Level atria, cold baths with rich coloured mosaic, communal baths supplied with hot water and marble walls dividing off the steam baths.

The walls of these baths were threaded with pipes along which steam

passed, so that a level temperature was kept up in the floors and ceilings. If you recall the latest modern arrangements for heating ceilings you stand in admiration before the slim antique forms along which steam poured centuries ago, on the edge of the Libyan desert.

The African sun burns down upon the smooth blocks of marble which have lost nothing but their lustre in the course of the centuries. They are still eloquent witnesses to the Roman sense of beauty and comfort as well as to the fairytale wealth of this town where life has irrevocably died. Here is marble of all colours, brought from Italy, Egypt, Greece and Asia Minor. Pillars with Corinthian capitals of an infinite variety of form. Marble latrines where once water flushed. Beautiful statues of white marble in the public places. A sports arena with stone tribunes. Spacious squares. Temples going far towards the sea which today washes at the foot of ruins.

The scaffolding round the stone blocks of the circus is new, for it is being carefully restored and has to be literally dug out of the deep drifts of sand.

You are again overcome with admiration when you realise that most of the city is still sleeping, undiscovered, waiting for the excavations begun by the Italians in 1920 to be continued. Ton by ton the sand slowly yields the testimony of history and gives up its secrets one by one. Today the whole surroundings of Leptis Magna are dead. Your Arab guide shrugs his shoulders when you ask for a glass of water to drink, and tells you there is no water here. It has to be carried here . . .

Once more you go back two thousand years to find out how this vast city with its spacious baths calling for hectolitres of water could possibly live. And you discover that the mysterious source of all this water was a distant river whose waters were turned aside during the rainy season into enormous cisterns. Even these reserves were insufficient as the city grew larger, and so the people of Leptis Magna dug vast underground tanks to hold rainwater for the city in the long dry months.

The luxury of the city, destined only for the small class of full citizens of Rome and created by the immeasurable suffering of many times that number of slaves, seems immoral today from the social point of view. But the good taste, the art, the hygiene and care for the body shown by Leptis Magna remain an example worth following even after many centuries.

Leptis Magna and Sabrata reached the height of their fame in the second century A. D. Then Leptis Magna gave Rome its emperor. Within its walls Septimius Severus was born in 146; even when he exchanged the shores of Africa for the Imperial Palace in Rome, he never forget his home town.

In Sabrata a wonderful theatre for 5,000 spectators was built at great

expense. It is one of the best-preserved Roman theatres, and its three storey colonnade has no equal today. No large-scale repairs were needed for its stone steps to fill with spectators once more after centuries had passed, and for the dumb stage to come to life again.

In the fourth century hordes of robber Berbers came down upon Leptis Magna and Sabrata in their flower. Their work of destruction was completed by the Vandals, who swarmed into North Africa from Spain.

Not until the sixth century did the towns come under the rule of Byzantium and awaken to new life for a time. But just as they were recovering from the blows they suffered at the hands of their previous masters they received the final blow from which they never recovered. The wave of wild, fanatical Islam swept into the sea the cultured civilisation of those who carried on the tradition of Phoenicia and Rome; they turned the two towns into quarries, into an inexhaustible source of marble columns. The columns began to disappear to turn up again in newly-built Arab mosques hundreds of kilometres away. Then the desert covered the gaping wounds and the ruins were forgotten . . .

At the end of the seventeenth century the French consul in Tripoli remembered the past glory of Sabrata and Leptis Magna; he had long been wondering how he could ingratiate himself with his ruler, Louis XIV. Finally he had an idea which had not been bettered even by the Arab robbers. Over six hundred columns of rare marble disappeared for ever from the forum in Leptis Magna and appeared at the court of France as a gift from the French consul. After the work of the fanatical Arabs this was the second act of destruction which prevented archeologists from reconstructing these cities, whose glory was without rival for centuries.





Chapter Four

BEYOND THE INVISIBLE BARRIER OF THE KORAN

As a geographical entity Libya is over two and a half thousand years old. The historian of the Ancient World, Herodotus, includes under the name of Libya the whole of North Africa with the exception of Egypt, and mentions two groups of inhabitants living at that time on the territory now known as Libya.

The interior of the land was inhabited by Ethiopians of Negro origin, while the coastal region was inhabited by Libyans, the forefathers of the Berbers of today, who were later forced back into the interior of the country by the invasion of the Arabs.

Herodotus mentions that one of the Libyan tribes living in the Fezzan region used light two-wheeled carriages drawn by four horses to hunt Ethiopian troglodytes who were then sold into slavery. It is interesting that in this case Herodotus, whose reliability has often been doubted, has been proved to be right. Not long ago an Italian anthropological expedition discovered in the Fezzan region wall paintings depicting these two-wheeled carriages.

Underground villages

These primitive drawings cut into the stone are but dead historical documents, but a more interesting and almost incredible proof of the fact that today, two and a half thousand years after the time of Herodotus, there are still people in Libya living under the ground can be found not far from Tripoli. Here there are African troglodytes living exactly as the Ethiopians did before them, when hundreds of years ago they were hunted like wild beasts by the Libyans.

A few dozen kilometres from the coast, in the middle of the upland plateau of Djebel Nefusa, the narrow-gauge railway laid here years ago by the Italians comes to an end. The steel lines burned by the fierce heat of the sun stretch across the sand in an endless line. Once a week a miniature locomotive with a couple of coaches behind it rattles breathlessly into the interior. Alongside the spine of sleepers with its double cord of steel the asphalt strip of the main road runs through the desert. Today it is in a far better state than the coast road, which has suffered from the war. Before reaching Garian the road stretched out straight like a string starts twisting in a maze of tiny threads along which the car climbs to a thousand feet above sea level.

Without a reliable guide you would hardly be able to find the homes of the Garian troglodytes. There are only low mounds to show that man's hand has left its mark on the desert; there are no traces of half-ruined huts or the moveable tents of the Berber nomads. Here the people live below the ground.

And yet there is an enormous difference between the underground homes of the Libyan troglodytes and the homes of prehistoric man as the Englishman Worthington Smith describes them. Nothing is left here but the system which is pleasantest and most acceptable to people who have never seen a Gothic arch or a modern building of reinforced concrete. The earth has always been a reliable protection for man. It cannot be burned down like a wooden hut. It cannot be knocked down. Here in the waterless desert there is not even the danger of being flooded out. And in addition the earth here offers a simple, natural refuge from the hundred and twenty degrees of heat of the desert, poor both in vegetation and in shadow.

With our own eyes we saw proof that the Libyan troglodytes do not consider their underground buildings to be a mere historical survival. Around Garian and Bou Gheilan brand-new "underground houses" are still being built.

The Berber measures a fifteen foot square with the precision of a sur-

veyor. And then he and his neighbours get to work. He does not hurry; he takes it seriously. When after a few weeks of work the party has reached a depth of thirty-two feet, the vertical direction is changed and digging proceeds horizontally. From one corner of the pit a long sloping corridor leads up to the surface; it must be wide enough for a camel to pass. The area of the pit is big enough to allow for other exits, which widen to form living rooms, storehouses for grain and esparta grass, stables for camels and cattle, and workshops.

We were amazed to see how clean these Arabs kept their underground homes. The yard is carefully swept, and clothes lines hung with washing stretch from corner to corner. In the twilight of one of the cave-like rooms a camel was chewing grass. In another was a deserted loom — deserted because during the two minutes we had to wait before going underground all the women and grown girls went away into another room to remain hidden from the eyes of strangers.

The primitive caves with a single entrance have been gradually demoted by the inhabitants of Garian to serve as potters' workshops and drying-rooms. But the walls of the artificial underground homes are plastered with fine potter's clay. You are struck by the painted pillars which seem to stand off from the walls, as straight as if drawn with a ruler. On the ceilings are very successful drawings and paintings.

The underground villages round Garian and Djebel Nefusa are not the only ones on the North African coast. They are to be found here and there in southern Tunis, in Algeria and in Morocco. They are permanent homes.

But the Libyan Arabs in Tarhuna and Msellata have discovered the idea of a summer residence. They live in tents or primitive huts, but in the summer move into underground villages where they are sure of even temperature and cool shade.

After the first impressions of surprise are over you begin to see the problems offered by this strange way the troglodytes of Garian live. Their underground homes are clean, much cleaner than those of the Arabs on the coast. The people of Garian do not live under the direct influence of the "civilisation" brought here by the colonial system. They are more independent than the Arabs in the Tripoli docks, who are dependent on their uncertain earnings.

But in spite of the greatest care for cleanliness their homes are still only dark caves. The only light space in them is the courtyard at the foot of the main pit. All the rest are dark, cold and damp chambers. The women and children in fact spend the whole year underground; if they go out into the sun for a while their organism is exposed to violent extremes. Eyes accustom-

ed to the half-dark underground suffer from the sudden transition to the sharp light of the desert sun. The living rooms where no ray of sunshine ever penetrates are full of stale air. And what is the result? Serious lung and eye troubles, the curse of the people of Garian.

You cannot help asking yourself why the people of Garian live more or less as their forefathers twenty-five centuries ago. Why should people of the twentieth century live below the ground, people who were born in the age of reinforced concrete, electricity, the wireless and the film, in the age of the motor car and the aeroplane? Why do they live sixty odd feet below the earth, in the darkness, in homes where no plumbing and no electric light can be installed?

Perhaps the troglodytes of Garian thought it over too, and still preferred solitude and underground dwellings to the Tripoli Arab quarter or to a poverty-stricken existence on some farm. The life of shepherds and farmers in the fifth century before Christ still seems to them preferable to the life led by Arab workers in a colonial country in the twentieth century A. D.

A red-hot iron cure

Throughout North Africa Islam rules over the people, but rarely so completely as in Tripolitania. The life of the twentieth century beats with the strong pulse of a modern dock town against the skin of the old world, with the sound of American motor horns, the rhythm of jazz, the whine of planes, coloured films and the Arab programme of the BBC. But it affects nothing but the surface.

In the middle of it all mediaeval life flows on apparently undisturbed in its slow passivity, buried beneath a mountain of prejudice and superstition behind the invisible barrier of the Koran.

The colonial authorities in Tripolitania announced - but there it rested - a campaign against these conditions. Children are vaccinated against small-pox. Free medical care in the out-patients' department of the Tripoli hospital has been offered. In the model slaughterhouse lined with snow-white tiles, washed down by streams of water after the day's work is done, you see hygienic regulations quite as strict as in any modern European slaughterhouse in a large town. Every piece of meat is tested at various places to find out whether it is dangerous to health. You cannot really find the slightest fault with these health measures. Nothing but healthy cattle come here to be slaughtered. Obviously sick animals would not be admitted. It stands to reason that they are slaughtered and sold outside the slaughterhouse.

In Tripoli they are carrying on a campaign against insect pests; trusses of grass dipped in disinfectant are hung on every house. This campaign, carried on purely formally and by orders of the colonial authorities, has no hope of success against the irresistible avalanche of tradition.

On the marketplaces we often saw Arabs whose bodies bore the traces of deep wounds on the temples, on the hands and on the trunk. All these wounds came from the same source — they were the marks left by Arab “doctors’” medicine.

Not long ago the Prague cinemas were showing Hackenschmied’s film about the primitive methods of “curing” the sick in Mexican villages. It was a most effective piece of film propaganda. And yet it showed nothing worse than muttering charms and placing snake’s skin on the affected spots. For the Arabs charms and healing herbs are too weak. If a Tripolitanian Arab has a pain, he is convinced that an evil spirit has got into his body. The greater the pain, the stronger the enemy within — and the stronger must be the means by which the “doctors” drive the evil spirit out of his body.

Side by side with the sellers of tomatoes, sheeps’ heads and charcoal at the weekly markets the Arab doctors carry on their trade. Their profession is not formally permitted to exist, but it is to be found in almost every *suk* in the interior. Their only “medicine” is a red-hot iron. If a man’s eyes ache, the charlatan burns a terrible wound into his temples. If he has pneumonia the wound is inflicted on his back and if he suffers from some disease of the digestive system he is “cured” by a wound on the abdomen. It is terrible to see the simple matter-of-factness with which these operations are unceremoniously carried out. They have nothing at all in common with the mysterious ceremonies of the witch-doctors of Negro tribes, which old travel books often spoke about among the tribes of Central Africa.

If the sick man gets well after this treatment it is to the doctor’s credit. If he dies — it is the will of Allah. The nomads, just like the majority of the Arabs living in the towns of Tripolitania, have far greater faith in these methods than in the out-patients’ department with its clean operating rooms.

There is another kind of treatment practised in the interior of Tripolitania, on the Libya-Tunisia frontiers. If a small child falls ill the shepherd kills a lamb and places the child in the warm entrails of the beast. There it is left until the entrails grow cold — or the child. Here the belief still persists that the animal warmth from a freshly killed beast passes into the sick body and cures it.

In this particular case the child was suffering from a severe attack of pneumonia and died in the entrails of the lamb. The will of Allah.

Infant mortality in Tripolitania is unusually high. Not the slightest care

is provided for either mother or child. When we were going over a big farm in Sorma we saw among the men and women many children employed in shelling and sorting almonds. Dirty, thin, dressed in rags. But they were happy to be able to make a few lira a week and eat their fill of almonds as well.

In the course of conversation we happened to hear that just before we arrived an Arab woman had given birth to a child in the middle of a group of workers. Two hours later we saw the woman at work; the child was lying on a pile of almond shells.

The few remaining supporters of the Duce, as well as the official spokesmen of the British authorities in Tripoli today, are always showing off to the superficial enquirer the health measures taken in the interests of the Arab population of the colony. They are never tired of talking about the advantages of free medical care for the Arabs, the systematic health measures and even the social benefits provided in the colony.

It is true that in the capital of the colony you can see for yourself that such measures do exist — and normally the tourist does not bother to investigate matters any further. And in the stinking little streets of the Arab quarter he sees nothing but the “magic of the East”, instead of a hotbed of disease. If you want to find out how the colonial government tries to educate the local population and persuade them of the necessity for progress and of the effectiveness and necessity for health measures — you will discover a strange thing. The authorities cannot resort to enforcement or other forms of pressure, because — just imagine; because they respect the independence of the coloured people!

Chained by dogma

86% of the inhabitants of Libya profess the Mohammedan faith. The majority are Arabs; the nomad Berbers are less numerous, and then living scattered among both groups are the descendants of Arab women and Turkish fathers, who settled here after the Turkish invasion of North Africa. Nevertheless this, numerically the most numerous section of the population of Libya, has not yet played its share in governing the the fate of the country. There are several reasons for this.

For centuries the relations between the Arabs settled in the coastal regions and the nomad Berbers of the interior have been hostile. After the invasion of African territory by the Mohammedans the Berbers were driven from their original settlements along the coast. They gave way before the invaders' superior numbers and their fanaticism, they even accepted their

religion, but they never made their peace with them. Even today there are often clashes between Arabs and Berbers with bloodshed on both sides. The members of the two groups themselves have long forgotten the real cause of their mutual dislike, and nothing remains but age-old hatred which finds every outlet it can. The Berber women are much more militant than the Arab women and often take command in skirmishes. The Arabs respect this personal courage in the Berber women, but this does nothing to mitigate their mutual hostility. During air-raids in the war Berber women never tried to flee from the threat of danger. Where they were employed as servants they went calmly on with their work. They scorn death.

The fact that the groups are scattered, and the existence of this warfare between Arabs and Berbers, provide one of the reasons why their longing to rule their own country has never yet achieved its aim.

An equally great obstacle is the corruption of the rich and influential Arabs in Tripolitania, and the insatiable greed for money which is deeply rooted in them. Money has always played an important part in the power politics of the European rulers of Libya. They were always ready and willing to bribe influential local personages. The same method was used by the Italians when they completed their occupation of the country, and their investment was returned to them manifold. At the same time this deepened the gulf between the broad masses of the poor people and the small oligarchy of wealthy Arabs who by their services to their new rulers earned gold and silver hems to their *burnous*, power and well-paid positions.

There can be no doubt, however, that an equally serious obstacle in the way of a successful struggle against the European colonisers of the country is religion itself. The Koran has always been the most powerful ally of all who have ruled over Mohammedan countries, French, Spaniards, Britons or Italians, it makes no difference.

Perhaps the philosophy of the Koran is too mystical for the "infidel" to understand. But today not even the most fanatical believers in Islam understand it. They do not even understand the text, let alone the contents. From the cradle to the grave they are imprisoned by its dogmas, dogmas which they are not allowed to question. Yet even so we met young Arabs who are slowly beginning to realise the real cause of their unhappy state. They criticise religious prejudice, even if cautiously. They dress like Europeans and do not know how to manage the five yards of woolen cloth, the *khauli*, which is the universal Arab dress throughout Tripolitania. They cast longing glances to the east, towards Egypt, which is much further along the road to freedom from religious prejudice. They condemn polygamy, and speak with ridicule of the religious practices of *ramadan*. They go to the cinema and admire air-

craft engines. Nevertheless they are careful to keep the fast from sunrise to sunset during the whole month of *ramadan*, from fear of the severe punishments which the head of the Arab religious community has unlimited power to inflict. They believe that the next generation will succeed in getting rid of the unfortunate anachronism dictated by Islam, but they themselves do not know how to begin.

Wealthy Arabs are accustomed to send their sons to study at the university of Al Azhar in Cairo. Here they spend long years studying the letter and the spirit of the Koran, and when they know it off by heart they are given a white turban and return home to knock the *suras* of the Koran into the heads of the children in private schools.

"We don't need people who know the Koran off by heart," was the indignant criticism we often heard on the lips of eighteen-year-old Salim Shatani. "We need doctors, engineers, builders, agronomes. We know how to drive a car but not how to make one. We know how to switch on the light, but we don't know why the electric light bulb shines. We need teachers to tell us something about a democratic constitution or about the technique of the coloured film, instead of the Koran . . ."

Salim knows all that, but he is afraid to think out why it is that his dreams are not coming true. He is afraid to seek a practical way to realise his longing for progress, because he feels instinctively that he would come up against the opposition of the European rulers of his country. Salim is afraid of that. He is one of those few fortunate people to whom the British gave not only schooling, but a decent job in the Tripoli Post Office. His boss promised that he would send him — perhaps the only lad from the whole of Tripolitania — to London to a secondary school. Salim wants to study, he wants to learn, he wants to know as much as possible, more than the ignorant lads around him. In London he might even get to the university. But he is afraid to utter such a hope, for it calls up too incredible visions.

Salim wants to be an engineer or a doctor, a builder or a draughtsman. He wants to have knowledge which will help his country. The only person who may, perhaps, send him to school is his English boss. But Salim does not yet know that the British do not need either doctors nor engineers in Tripoli. They choose the most talented young people, those who cannot endure in silence and are a potential danger to the colonial authorities. These are the people the rulers need to get on their side, to give them the feeling of gratitude — and in the end train them as administrative officials who will help them to keep their rule in the colony firm.

What the world looks like through a slit in the khauli

You will never see a Tripolitanian Arab woman in the cinema or anywhere else in company. The Mohammedan world here belongs to the men, outside the four brick walls of the house.

In Arab houses you notice at once that there are two kinds of windows. The first are in no way different from European windows, but the second have nothing in common with them. They cannot be opened, nor is there any glass in them. They look more like a wooden hencoop or the iron bars of a prison cell for dangerous criminals. The window frame is simply filled with wooden bars placed close together and criss-crossed. They look more like a Linz tart than a window.

But behind these windows live the Arab women. And here they spend their whole life. Nobody, except their husband and a few women he approves of, may ever see their face. The tiny lozenges between the window bars provide their only link with the world.

In Europe the view is often widespread that polygamy is becoming more and more out-of-date among the Arabs, confined to a few primitive backward tribes. This is a mistake. Throughout the world of Islam, with the exception perhaps of Turkey and Egypt, and even there not completely, you meet with this custom. It is founded on the letter of the Koran, and the number of wives is regulated only by the wealth of the husband.

We did our best to find some fact which could be taken to mean that Arab women in Tripolitania have at least some rights according to the European or even the Turkish conception of the word. In vain. The Arabs themselves admit it, with embarrassment, but call the Koran to their defence. The women do not take their meals together with the men of the house. They are completely isolated. Before entering an Arab house you have to wait until all the women have gone out of sight. Your host never introduces them to you. In a polite conversation you may enquire after your host's health, and you may ask how his sheep or camels or asses are, but it must never even occur to you to mention his wife in any way. It would be a grave social crime.

Between the tenth and twelfth year of age all Muslim women in Libya are cursed by the *khauli*, which is typical for Tripolitania. The *khauli* is a broad piece of heavy woolen material five yards long. A veil over the nose and mouth, such as is still worn in Tangier or Morocco, would reveal too much of the face of the women of Libya. Only with one eye are they allowed to squint at the world through a narrow slit in the *khauli*, if their husbands allow them to leave the house at all. The strict order not to leave the house,

applied to the majority of younger women, is so rigidly enforced that it would not even occur to a woman to disobey.

The whole problem of the ignorance of the Libyan Arabs is the logical outcome of this life-long slavery and imprisonment of their women. You cannot expect an illiterate mother who has never been given even the most elementary education to bring up her children well. The Arabs themselves hold the key to a better future. As yet, however, they do not know how to begin, for it is as difficult for them to fight against their own religion as for them to fight against the European rulers of their country. They do not yet realise how these two struggles are connected. They know that their chief enemy is the foreigner who has imprisoned them within the status of colonies, protectorates and dominions, and who carries off the wealth of their country. They know, too, that the nonsensical, out-dated customs laid down by the Koran weaken the strength of their nation. But they do not yet understand that today the Koran is one of the most powerful weapons in the hands of their foreign slave-drivers, and that to break the bonds of the Koran would be to rob the colonial powers of their most effective weapon. They do not understand that it would mean releasing and giving vent to such economic, political and cultural creative ability among the people that no expedition force of any empire could stand up to it.

First and foremost, however, the imprisonment of Arab women will have to stop. That will mean a profound change in the Mohammedans' way of thinking. Often in the past they have taken up arms against imperialist armies, beaten them and driven them out of the land. But the liberation of the women of Tripolitania from their spiritual and physical slavery will require much greater courage than the fanatical struggle of Arab warriors against modern weapons.

The way of thinking of the Arabs of Libya is more influenced by the Mohammedans of the east than of the west. The younger generation carefully watches the results of pre-war Turkey's efforts at modernisation. They are well aware of the consequences of the desire for liberation, discarding the Arab alphabet, introducing European habits of dress, and creating a modern educational system. The change in the habits of thoughts of some members of this generation is even more profound because they realise that it is essential to emancipate and educate the broad masses of the people and not only a few privileged individuals. We Europeans find it difficult to realise what a revolution this means for them. They are the first simple Mohammedans in Libya to dare after long centuries to attack in their thoughts — and that only in the presence of their close friends — the iron dogmas of the Koran. They are blinded by the beauty of their picture of the new

Tripolitania, where there would be no illiterate people, where there would be enough schools, where — where there would not be a single *khauli*. These young Arabs are only just getting used to the immeasurable change which has taken place in them, and yet they are already trying to find their way and set out towards the realisation of their longings. They are moving blindly, like a man overcome by sudden bright light. They are afraid to open their eyes wide, and sometimes let themselves be led away by people they do not really believe; but one day they will see it all clearly . . .

There are of course many among the Arabs of Tripolitania who are very conscious of their backwardness and look for models they can follow. They feel that Ataturk's experiment can never be tried in Libya, but that Egypt is much nearer to them. Not only because the two countries have a joint frontier. Newspapers published by several different political parties come from Cairo into Libya. On the screen in Libyan cinemas you can see the products of the Egyptian film companies as well as modern American and European films; the former are much more popular with the Libyan Arabs than are the coloured films of the Paramount Company.

Even if Egyptian films are below the average European film in acting, in film technique and in the level of the story, still they show men in modern clothes and Arab women who can drive cars and address meetings. Meetings where there are more men than women! And the speaker does not look at them through a slit in the *khauli*. She has not even a veil, or the traditional dress. There is no difference in appearance between the Arab actress and the European!

The young Arabs of Tripolitania are willing to forgive the Egyptian actors their exaggerated gesticulation and the unnatural expressions on their faces. They are far more interested in the fact that a man who believes in the Koran just as they do can yet live in this way.

A riding whip when wages are paid out

In Libya we met Italians who even today, after they have lost the war, try to justify Italy's imperialist policy, the unlimited aggressiveness and brutality of the Mussolini regime, and his attack on Abyssinia in 1935.

The way they defend this regime even today is very typical of their mentality.

In their opinion Libya cost too much in the way of investment to become a credit force in the empire's economy, whereas in Abyssinia they found natural conditions and wage rates which allowed a much more intensive

“utilisation” of the country. We were given the opportunity to see with our own eyes the reasons why enormous latifundia could be created in Libya, and the capitalist way of economy become deeply rooted.

We were present when the Arab workers received their wages on a farm equipped with everything modern agricultural science could wish. It had its own power station and several rich wells as much as two and a half thousand feet deep. It had its own hygienic factory for processing olives with a daily capacity of 15,000 kilogrammes. There were underground grain stores in the form of spacious concrete silos. The farm, which covered an area of about 3,000 acres, had vast stables and barns.

This same owner had several other farms, whose total area was something like seven thousand acres, with endless olive groves and orchards of oranges, lemons and citrons, with acres of ground-nut plantations, vineyards and vegetable gardens. Neither the owner nor the bailiff could tell us the figures for the annual harvest. They simply did not know them. In this flood of thousands of trees and acres a few tons of oranges or a few hectolitres of olive oil here or there made no difference.

All the greater was our surprise to see the carefully kept wage lists. But they were not kept according to the workers' names, for the names of his Arab workers do not interest the Italian landowner. He is interested only in the final figures for the week's work. And these are horrifying. Wages are paid for groups of workers, four to six in each. They are paid piece-rates for an average of 60 hours' work a week.

More than an hour before payment was due to be made a crowd of poverty-stricken workers gathered in front of the estate bailiff's little office, the men on one side and the women and children on the other. Without exception they were thin and emaciated, dressed in rags, and waiting patiently for their wages. The bailiff's Arab assistant used a riding whip to ensure that nobody approached within more than three yards of the table. The women's and children's sunken faces greedily watched the Italian bailiff's hands as he counted over the greasy, crumpled notes; they all reached out their hands for the money, although they knew that the wages would be handed only to the head of the group to be divided among the rest. We watched carefully while the money was being paid out. The amounts varied from 100 to 250 liras for a group of four to six members. The highest achievement was 270 lira earned by a group of three women and three girls, i. e. 45 liras per person per week. That is about one shilling and tenpence. For one person for a whole week's work! less than a halfpenny for an hour's work. At that time a pound of bread cost 10 liras in Libya, about fourpence halfpenny.

We understood whence came the millions made by those Italian landowners who are still complaining all the time about the dreadful results of having lost the war. They miss Abyssinia, where wage-rates were even worse by far. Here there was nothing to prevent them introducing a purely slave system.

We understood the landowner's desire to lead us away from this compromising drama to a glass of cool wine. He wanted to show us the results of the Italians' efforts at colonisation, which had built an earthly paradise out of the desert, but had not counted with us arriving at his farm just when the wages were being paid on a Saturday — something which showed us clearly how this paradise was built, and for whom.

But the insatiable greed of the owners of these vast Libyan estates does not even stop before their own compatriots. Hundreds of old settlers have not even money to tide them over the post-war crisis. They had slaved with their families for fifteen or twenty years on the new concessions, but had not managed during that time to pay off even part of their heavy mortgages. The British military authorities took over the financial affairs of the defeated regime. Knowing that things are getting hot for them in Libya and that they will not hold on there long, they are doing their best to get all they can out of the colony for the short time of occupation left to them. They foreclosed on the long-term credits of the small farmers as soon as they found out that the big landowners had enough money to buy up at least the better of the small farms put up to auction. Thus after long years of hard work and self-denial the small farmers suddenly found themselves in the former colony without means of support, while their farms passed into the hands of the big estate-owners who had plenty of land already. The contrasts sharpen with extraordinary rapidity. Against these individuals who are growing steadily richer and more powerful have suddenly emerged masses of bewildered men, poor and powerless in their scattered state, and in the case of the Arab workers encumbered by their incredible degree of illiteracy.

Thus finally come to light the reasons for the fact that workers on Libya farms slave 60 hours a week for a wage which at the best, and in exceptional cases, is enough to buy them five pounds of bread.

The short time we spent among the Arab workers on this Libyan farm was a shocking revelation to us. But not until our last conversation with the Italian owner did we see right into the depths of the infinite selfishness and cynicism of this representative of an immoral colonial system. The last war forced him to flee from Abyssinia. He spoke of the war with disgust and condemned both Graziani and Balbo.

Because they led the Italian armies into a war of aggression?

Oh, no. Because they did it "inefficiently".

"In the next war, *signori*, in the next war we must profit from the experience we have so dearly bought."

"So you believe there will be another war?"

"Of course. There must be war. There have always been wars and there always will be. That's an unalterable law, like the law of gravitation."

"But surely every war costs terrible sacrifice. Half of Italy was destroyed during the last war, and your losses were not small, either."

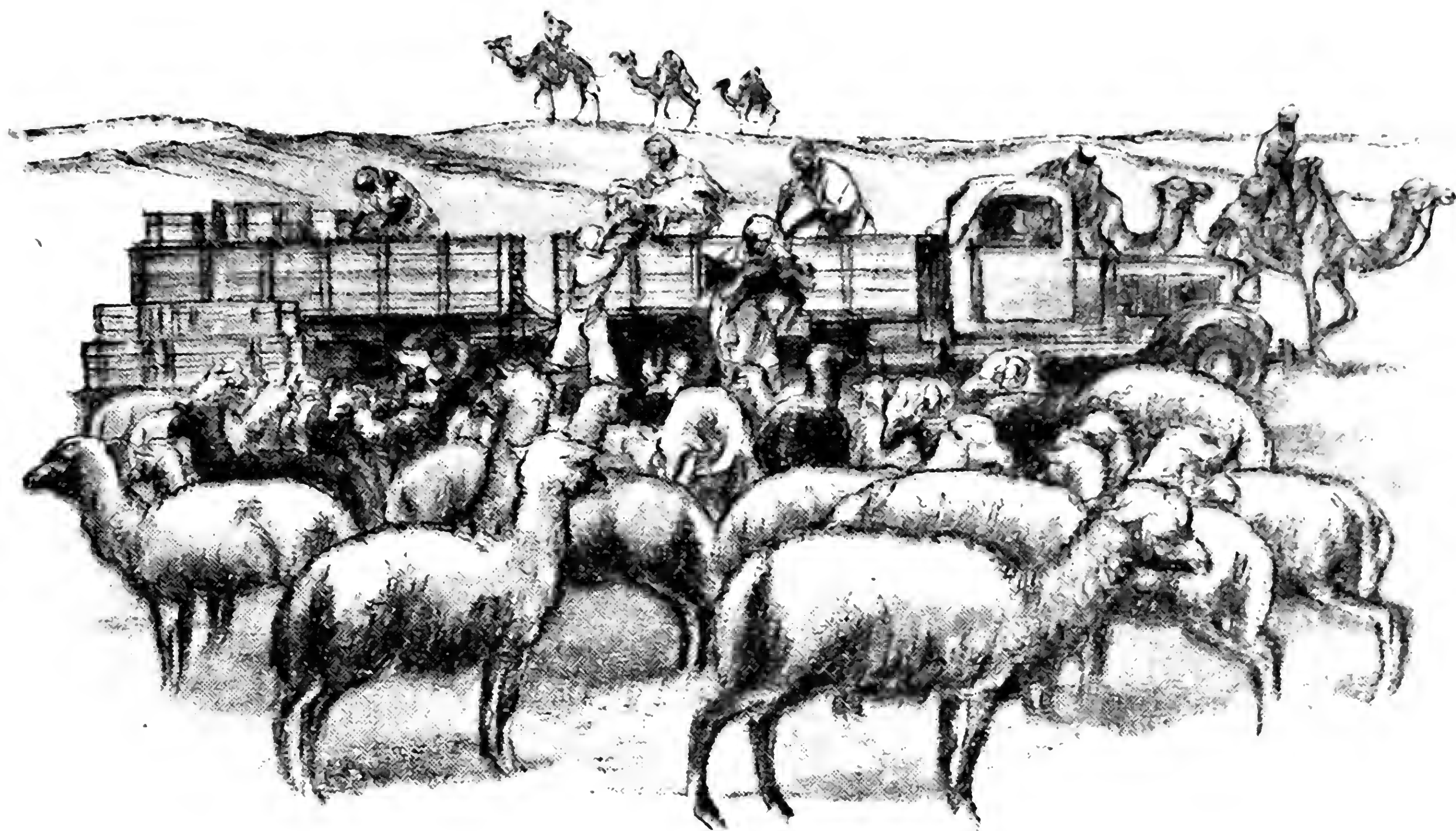
"You talk like weaklings. War is natural process of selection. The weak have to bear the consequences of war, and the strong come to the top. At the front, in politics and in business. War suits me."

Signor Piacentini, Tripolitanian estate-owner, is not pleased with the second world war. He is living in "poverty" on a mere ten thousand acres of land in Tripolitania because his fascist party was unable to win an aggressive war. He was disappointed by the last war because he was forced to give up much bigger and more profitable estates in Abyssinia.

Signor Piacentini is longing for another war which would open him the way to new colonies. War suits him, because in his mind the ideal man is the same as a beast of prey.

Signor Piacentini is longing for another war, because the landslide of heedless selfishness and miserliness has stifled within him the last traces of humanity . . .





Chapter Five

TO THE PYRAMIDS WITHOUT OUR TATRA

"... well, we can't let you into Cyrenaica on these visas."

"But they were issued by the British authorities!"

"By the British civil authorities, gentlemen. I represent the military authorities."

"To the best of my knowledge any office which issues a transit visa and endorses it in a passport must be authorised to do so. And it is usual for such a visa to be respected by all the authorities representing that government."

"Sorry, I'm afraid I've nothing more to add."

The colonel in the British military office in Tripoli stubbed the cigarette he had lighted only a moment before and rose from his chair as a sign that he considered the interview over. That of course would have meant cutting across all our plans for our travels.

"Just one more question, sir."

"I do not want to repeat myself."

"It is our hope, too, that this is the last time before we leave for Cyrenaica. In the first place: if His Majesty's Government did not wish us to

travel through this territory then its representatives in the General Consulate in Algiers should not have issued us a valid transit visa. In the second place: if the British military authorities consider this visa to be invalid, then they must point this fact out at the Tripolitanian frontier and not remain silent until we are in the capital . . .”

“I do not wish . . .”

“May we finish what we have to say?”

“ . . . certainly.”

The colonel sat down again with a glum look.

“In the third place: if you yourself are not competent to endorse the validity of visas issued then there must be in Tripoli a representative of the British military authorities who is competent to do so. Be good enough to give us an introduction to him.”

He handed us a card with a name and address and favoured us with an ironic smile.

“Good luck!”

It was not until we experienced this odyssey that we realised the connection between a number of things which we had thought were just chance, and which happened during our stay in Tripoli. A whole series of people passed before our eyes. There was the young man trained in the Balilla with his fanatical uncompromising faith in the Duce's heritage. Several Englishmen, in civvies and in military and police uniform. There was the young Scot who “confidentially” told us of his job in the Intelligence Service and told us he was detailed to watch us, and told us of his intention to leave the Service as soon as possible in order to finish his studies in England.

The sequence of their questions was remarkably similar. The question of our car and our travels was always finished with in five minutes, and then all our Tripoli “friends” without distinction devoted themselves with admirable patience to questions of world politics, to the colonial question, to the form and content of our co-operation with the Czechoslovak authorities . . .

The last tough interview with a representative of the British military authorities ended and our visas were endorsed. We spent our last night in the little Greek hotel with our Tatra resting in front in the half-dark street.

A smash in the middle of the desert

The Tatra's speedometer ticked off the five hundredth kilometre along the melting asphalt road, battered by the sun and the war. Five hundred kilometres along the coast of the Gran Sirte bay.

"We ought to get to Sirte on the Cyrenaican frontier soon."

"That means the first petrol pump. We'll fill up and have a good sleep."

The monotonous sound of the engine, which had remained for hours pitched at the same note, went slowly down. We turned a slow bend in the road alongside a high mud wall, and there were two heavy lorries with trailers at the bend of the road.

"Look out! . . . Put the brake on!"

"I can't . . . the hand brake . . . Look out! Hold tight!"

Twenty yards in front of the car appeared a heavy iron bar on supports, just at the height of our Tatra's windscreen. The pedal of the hydraulic brake slid to the floor without resistance. The hand brake gripped slightly and then loosened. At the last moment we pulled the car head on to the concrete post. There was a collision, glass tinkled, and then silence.

"Anything happened to you?"

"I hit my head a bit. There's blood on your leg. And on the other leg, too."

"Yours too. It's only a surface scratch from the glass."

With great difficulty we got the battered door open. The force of the overloaded vehicle which was running at about 50 kilometres an hour had completed the destruction. The front bonnet, the head-lamps, the bumper, the steering, the battery, the whole mechanism of the front of the car had been severely damaged by our collision with the concrete post.

Our first thought was of course for the brakes, both of which had let us down at the critical moment.

By the back left wheel were a few drops of brake fluid. We got out the jack, took off the wheel panel and the wheel.

There was a five-centimetre tear in the flexible central section of the brake tubing, which is never damaged. The edge of the tear was quite clean, both on the rubber outer casing and the firm internal webbing. Only the inside was torn. The outer casing of the tubing, which strengthens it during the greatest strain, was torn for five centimetres.

At the frayed end of the broken brake cable not more than a quarter of the threads were torn; the rest had been cut.

It was clear at first sight that the damage to the brakes could not have been noticed during soft braking. It was not until the brakes had to take their full load at the critical moment that the complete breakdown occurred.

It was not just a matter of chance. Nor could the accident be blamed on to the dangerous situation at the frontier.

The warning notice before the bend in the road, drawing attention to the barrier at the frontier, had swung round ninety degrees and the writing

faced into the desert. In the bend itself, where we could have seen the barrier in time for ourselves, stood two lorries with trailers taking up the crown of the road, so that they blocked our view until the very last moment.

We looked over the scene of the accident. The heavy iron bar, fixed at one end into a massive concrete post, was lying in a steel fork jutting from the second post, and was held down by a strong chain and lock. The rusty surface of the barrier mingled with the sandy hue of the desert and the road beyond. The whole length of the barrier we found only one trace of the original white or perhaps red and white warning paint.

"A good job you pulled the car into that post. I don't like the idea of us driving straight at that barrier."

"Measure the height of the barrier off the ground, will you?"

"Exactly the height of our heads in the moving car..."

We took documentary shots of the scene, the frontier guards wrote up the record of the incident, we attended to our cuts, and then we spent a little while in gloomy conversation over a cup of coffee.

There was no question of whether to go on or not.

Touring the world is not a matter for certainties. You can run into worse situations than an accident to your car in the middle of the desert.

The question was how to go on.

The car was fully insured against all risks, as a matter of fact with the English firm of Lloyd's. So there was no need to worry about the financial side of the accident.

The first necessity was a car which would run, and for that we needed to get in touch with home and arrange for spare parts to be sent. We looked at the map; the nearest port was Tripoli, 500 kilometres to the north west; the next was Alexandria, 2000 kilometres to the east. Benghazi and Tobruk, destroyed by war operations, could not be considered.

That same evening dozens of willing hands helped us to load our smashed Tatra on to a lorry. Direction: Tripoli.

Into Egypt

The aged lorry rocked across the Libyan desert for two days and two nights before it got to the streets of the capital, Tripoli.

The first telegram went off to Czechoslovakia:

SMASH IN SIRTE BRAKES FAULTY FRONT DAMAGED BOTH SAFE
AIRLETTER FOLLOWS HANZELKA ZIKMUND.

Our detailed letter containing an estimate of the damage, the proposal that the car should be repaired in Tripoli and a list of essential spare parts was written in bed. What had appeared at first sight to be harmless cuts were festering as a result of infection, and both of us were suffering from severe inflammation of the veins.

There passed two long weeks while our letter went on its pilgrimage to Czechoslovakia — two weeks of waiting enlivened only by the doctor's visits, the extermination of cockroaches, dressing our wounds, and an occupation ideally suited to our Tripoli "imprisonment": making paper cases for our photographic material.

Finally the reply to our telegram came from Prague:

DO NOT REPAIR STOP THREE TATRAS 87 ALEXANDRIA STILL
WAITING CUSTOMS CLEARANCE IN HARBOUR STOP TAKE ONE
FOR JOURNEY STOP SEND OLD CAR TO KOPRIVNICE WORKS
IN THAT CRATE TATRA.

It took another fortnight before we could walk about, and another month before we surmounted all the obstacles persistently placed in our way by the British military authorities in Tripoli — fictitious regulations and instructions which had never been issued; wrong information; intervention with the transport companies; and personal pressure; all repeated to the point of boredom.

"Your three-months visas for Egypt have already expired."

"According to the Egyptian regulations we must enter the country within six months of the visa being issued, and only then does the three months' validity of the visa for residence in the country and timely departure for Sudan commence."

"We are informed otherwise. If you wish to go on to Egypt and the Sudan with these documents, we shall refuse to give you an exit permit from Tripolitania. We only did that once, against the military regulations."

"For what country will you give us a permit?"

"For France. Or Italy. Or anywhere else in Europe."

"We have no visas for European countries."

"We will help you. We have connections — only in Europe, of course."

"And for Egypt?"

"Out of question."

Thanks to the Czechoslovak Embassy in Cairo we were given new visas in spite of the fact that according to valid international regulations we did not require them, and thus the last objection the British military authorities in Tripoli could think up was overcome.

Exactly two months had passed since the day of our accident. The damaged car sailed for Alexandria in a cargo boat, but thanks to the British authorities we ourselves were not taken on board. It was close on midnight when an overloaded Fiat 34 lorry drew up in front of our hotel.

"Andiamo, signori!" The muscular Italian driver seized our largest piece of luggage and added it to the growing pile on the top of the pyramid of crates and casks.

"Giorgio, Miro, andiamo!"

"To Benghazi."

"How far is it?"

"1080 kilometres."

"And how do we go on from there?"

"From time to time a lorry turns up heading for Derna and Tobruk. That's another 600 kilometres."

"And then what?"

"There are other lorries carrying sheep right to Egypt."

"Let's go!"

"To Benghazi?"

"To Egypt!"





Chapter Six

TOBRUK ACCUSES

"Stand still! For God's sake don't move!"

George, to whom this horrified call was addressed, looked round in surprise and remained standing still in the desert, a long way from the road. The driver of the Italian lorry parked by the roadside ran to some low dunes from which the wrecks of shot-up vehicles stuck out.

"Don't move! You're in a minefield!"

For a moment the blood stood still in our veins. What we had wanted to record on the camera's sensitive strip of film was still about a hundred feet away: a pile of whitened bones, among them clearly recognisable camel skeletons, gleamed dead white against the yellow of the desert in the sharp light of the afternoon sun.

"Come back to the road carefully in your own tracks. Whatever were you thinking of? Can't you see the skeletons? . . ."

Slowly and carefully he returned to the grey strip of the asphalt.

"The war is still hanging in the air here — only the road is safe."

It was a long time before the colour came back to our cheeks. We

climbed up into the cabin of the Fiat again and drove on towards Benghazi. There still remained about sixty kilometres to El Agheila. The heap of whitening bones remained somewhere behind us, like a warning. The ghost of war, a war which had been formally ended here several years before, came to life again.

Five-column retreat

At the most southerly point of the Gran Sirte bay, a few dozen kilometres beyond the pretentious marble arch of Filene, lies a small police post lost in the middle of the desert.

Here sunburned Senussi greet you with a smile, a slice of bread and a bunch of grapes. It does not often happen that a car comes their way, and hardly ever bringing foreigners.

High on the flagstaff flutters the half-moon on a black ground, the symbol of the police authorities, the *Cyrenaica Defence Force*. From here runs a dusty track deep into the desert to the south, to the Kufra oasis; from there it takes a light military vehicle only a few days to reach Wadi Halfa on the Egyptian-Sudanese frontier.

This little place, so small that you will only find it on a very detailed map of Libya, is called El Agheila. But however small it is, it means a great deal to anybody who followed the fate of the war in Libya during the years when Goebbels' loudspeakers were still pouring out boastful phrases about successes in North Africa. It means equally much to anybody who follows with growing disquiet the power policy of Great Britain in North Africa.

From El Agheila the coast road turns sharply to the north-east and keeps offering surprise on surprise. After driving for a few dozen kilometres you feel as if you were on the waves of a stormy sea. The road passes through regularly undulating country, followed on both sides by the still-visible tracks of tanks which had to give way to weaker vehicles and take to the desert. At the turn of 1942 to 1943 the mad flight of Rommel's panzers passed through here in three, four and even five columns.

Before you reach Agedabia the honey-coloured sand dunes come right close up to the road. Their gentle undulations stretch far along the horizon; the setting sun tints with mother-of-pearl the tops of the date palms, whose fan-like foliage tries in vain to escape the deathly embrace of the sand. The tall slender trunks are completely hidden by the flood of this mobile element, which has flowed over the gleaming strip of the road and pushed odd vehicles far into the desert.

Before you reach Benghazi the character of the landscape undergoes

a complete change. The bare desert disappears and you pass into thick groves of eucalyptus trees; after long hundreds of kilometres you again see almond and olive groves. You notice new telephone wires, sometimes as many as five rows of poles at a time, and these then go with you all the way to the Egyptian frontier.

Before entering Benghazi you see sparkling on either side of the road enormous mirror-like stretches of sea water marked off by low dykes. They are extensive salt pans from which sea salt is obtained. Water is let in through a system of irrigation canals, and the rest is done by the sun and the dry desert air. The sparkling oblong flats covered with pure white crystals remind you of the snowed-over slides on the frost-bound Vltava under Jirásek Bridge — but only for a moment, before the burning sun tears you from this fantasy and brings you back to reality in Africa.

Vinceremo!

There was a time when Benghazi was the capital of Cyrenaica and Mussolini's pride. Show palaces, the centre of the new colony which was to be the counterpart to the other branch — Tripolitania. It boasted a modern harbour, where so often the fate of the armies fighting throughout North Africa hung in the balance.

The Duce's megalomania left a giant cathedral here, the exterior of which is a medley of all possible styles of architecture. Perhaps it was intended as a symbol of the many and varied rulers who have passed through this land. But it is difficult to see here any appreciation for the harmony of the Roman tympanons and Byzantine cupolas of which the originals lord it over the Golden Horn in the Bosphorus.

In the spacious marble-panelled nave of the cathedral you will find the Order of Divine Service and cyclostyled news-sheets written in — German. Their provocative style and contents have little in common with the idea of piety among the believers for whom they are intended.

Here the German war prisoners, who are for the most part former SS-men, and who walk about the streets of Benghazi without guard and distinguished only by the black patches sewn on to their shirts, read inciting articles every day about "new concentration camps" in Germany which are said to be quite as bad as Belsen and Oswietim. The methods of denazification of Germany being employed do not, apparently, agree with what all Germans had in mind when they laid down arms.

You are still left with a ray of hope that they find the denazification

rough but too little effective. The rest of the "news" leaves you in no doubt. In the end you are forced to the conclusion that their idea of justice would be met by nominating all the former commanders of Nazi execution squads heads of departments in the new German administration.

It does not matter so much that the occupation authorities allowed or perhaps even encouraged the resurrection of Goebbels' lying spirit precisely within the walls of Benghazi cathedral. For two Czechoslovaks who had experienced Nazi "pacification" methods at too close quarters, the way German prisoners of war were being re-educated in Benghazi was an omen of something much worse. What could be the aim of the British occupation forces in Cyrenaica when only two years after the firing had died down on the battlefields of Europe they encouraged the Nazis to a new campaign of incitement, full of lies and agitating against even such desperately lukewarm methods of denazification as those practised in the Anglo-American zone in Germany?

At that time we were cut off from the development of affairs in Europe, and even in our wildest dreams we did not imagine that this was just part of a wider campaign of renazification being carried out in a land sewn with tens of thousands of white crosses from which the sand-storms had not yet had time to erase the names of the fallen...

Benghazi is still the capital of Cyrenaica today. At least in theory. In fact it is almost a dead town, where you will find only an occasional Italian and a few dozen other Europeans. The administration is in the hands of the British who have left an incredible measure of power in the hands of an economically and militarily strong group of Arabs. We ourselves saw the arrogant behaviour of some Senussis in Agedabia towards Italian lorry drivers with a load of a few tons of bottled beer for the military authorities in Benghazi.

It did not take us long to find out that this was typical for British colonial policy. We realised that there was nothing easier for the occupying power than to revive and systematically keep alive the bad feeling between the former severe colonisers and the children of their victims. It only required an apparent change of rôles, encouragement for the Senussis' desire for vengeance, and the legal disarmament of all Italians, and the British were able to become the decisive factor in Cyrenaica with the minimum number of officials.

Life in Benghazi has almost died out. At first glance the harbour looked deserted. In the town people only talked in whispers of the building of new warship bases. The streets of the town itself were lined by ruined houses with their doors and windows still blocked by rusty petrol cans. Nobody

lived behind these walls, but they still turned towards the street their pictures of Mussolini and their Italian slogans: *Agisci sempre come se il Duce ti vedesse!* "Always act as if the Duce were watching you!" And then again: *Vinceremo!* "We shall win!"

A handful of true-blue fascists who could not tear themselves away from the ruins of Benghazi walked past these slogans every day. Throughout the two years which had passed since the war within its walls had ended nobody had even found the courage to whitewash over these slogans, which bear cynical witness to the shortsightedness of those who led the people of Italy into the sufferings of war.

We stood and looked at the harbour of Benghazi on a clear moonlit night. The tall, heaving waves broke over wrecked and heeling ships, tons of the foamy element poured over the thirteen-foot mole and returned tirelessly to the sea, to meet the onset of new waves over and over again. This must have been what the sea looked like years ago, when heavy aircraft bombs and deadly torpedoes exploded beneath the keels of the ships.

The silence of the grave hung over Benghazi. The silhouettes of ruined houses stood out against the curtain of moonlight like stage sets facing an empty theatre. This picture was but a prelude to the last and most dramatic scene of the living film which unrolled before our eyes along the two thousand kilometres of the coast road.

In the steps of the Czechoslovak Regiment

No other place on the map of the North African coast offers such a convincing picture of murderous war in the desert as does Tobruk. How often did the name appear over and over again in the war news! The waves of war flowed over Tobruk six times; for two hundred and forty nine days the enemy besieged the town during the second German-Italian offensive which got far beyond Tobruk, right to the Halfa pass.

Once upon a time Tobruk was a pleasant small town 160 kilometres from the Egyptian frontier, with an advantageously situated harbour. Above the long trunk of the gulf rises the low barrier of the desert, with countless *wadis* cutting across it. You will find no drinking water anywhere round Tobruk. Horrible salty water seeps into the wells, but even that is rare. Before the war the Italians used to bring drinking water here from the mother peninsula in cistern ships, until wells were sunk in Derna, nearly two hundred kilometres away.

Water was the most valuable war material in Tobruk, needed by both

defenders and besiegers alike, for the water reservoirs were an easily attainable target. By some unwritten law water was given to the enemy even when the town's supplies were running short, for to refuse the ration of water would have meant inviting bombing of the reservoirs and the defenders' own destruction at a time when all roads of supply were very carefully watched and when the enemy had still the possibility of arranging difficult but nevertheless feasible supplies of water from Derna or Tripoli.

Today Tobruk is a dead cemetery, a silent witness to a mad destruction which had no parallel on African soil. Hundreds of thousands of bombs and grenades fell on the town and left not a building undamaged. It is a sea of ruins, from the harbour quays to the last little wineshop. On the inner wall of one half-ruined house you can still see the excellent drawings made by an Australian painter who passed the last days before the city fell here, in the uniform of the Allied armies. He may still be lying beneath the ruins of the house even today . . .

The one undamaged thing in Tobruk, the white minaret, rises above the ruins like a miracle. The cracked walls and the piles of debris of the mosque, as well as the craters all around, testify that death came raining down right by the minaret. In the doors and windows which remain in the mosque you see a familiar sight — neat rows of empty tins filled with sand, the one protection the defenders had.

In the main square of Tobruk, among the ruins, you will see the state emblem of Czechoslovakia, carefully made of small coloured stones and surrounded by white tiles. The English word: CZECHOSLOVAKIA recalls after all these years the Czechoslovak unit which fought in besieged Tobruk and together with Indian units guarded its defence lines.

The British commander of Tobruk finally agreed to our request and enabled us to go over the battlefields near by, accompanied of course by a military guard. A jeep with our guard took us as far as the anti-tank barriers on the inner defence line . . .

Strongpoint S 19 — HONZA

On the fifteenth of April 1941 in the course of the second German-Italian offensive Rommel skirted round Tobruk in a quick out-flanking manoeuvre, and hurried on to Bardia and the Egyptian frontier. When he returned a fortnight later to finish off this dangerous nest of enemies in the rear, he was met by an elastic line of defence, quickly built up, which resisted many months of concentrated attempts to break through.

That was the beginning of the well-known siege of Tobruk. For eight months the fate of Egypt depended on the fate of Tobruk, for Rommel left only a light force to secure the Egyptian frontier and hurled the main body of his army back to deal with Tobruk. During the first four months of the siege the town and the harbour were bombed over four hundred times. Over a quarter of a million kilogrammes of explosives and innumerable ground attacks were employed to break down the resistance of the "desert rats", as the defenders of the town were called by the Axis newsmen.

Tobruk was a thorn in the flesh to Rommel's staff. The Nazis were put to a great deal of trouble to build a new road through the desert, which was given the name of the "Axis by-pass". When the second British offensive began, aimed at the relief of Tobruk, the Czechoslovak regiment had been six months in action.

They were guarding the western sector of the Tobruk defence lines, which stretched in an arc of several kilometres from the coast to the coast. Even today you can see this line of defence, giving you the impression that it was only yesterday that the clangour of battle ceased behind these deep anti-tank ditches, minefields, and multiple barbed-wire entanglements. Over many of the sangars, banked round with sandbags, the torn white rags hung out by the Germans during the last British offensive can still be seen.

The centre of the Czechoslovak defence sector was the strongpoint S 19, which was given the code name of HONZA. It was only a few kilometres away from Tobruk, by the road leading from Derna, on the edge of a deep ravine into which a bridge had been hurled. On the night of the ninth to the tenth of December 1941 the skirmishes which had been going on for a few days came to a head and the Czechoslovak regiment came out from the strongpoint Honza to the attack. By dawn the whole front held by the Czechoslovak and Polish units was on the move. The battle raged for several hours, and shortly before ten o'clock the Czechoslovak flag was hoisted on point 110, which had been given the unit as its objective. After eight months of siege Tobruk was quiet once more. The Axis armies were retreating rapidly to El Akroma, and at the turn of the year the British reached El Agheila again, far to the west on the Gulf of Sirte.

Calm before the storm

The Czechoslovak unit passed its first Christmas in the field. It was indeed a feast of peace and quiet after their long defensive battle, for the front moved rapidly away. At the beginning of January a German convoy of nine ships managed to get into the Bay of Tripoli, and so Rommel decided

to retreat far beyond Agedabia in order to get as close as possible to the material which had arrived. In the middle of the fighting he managed to organise a counter-offensive and on January 21st, a few days after the British had reached El Agheila for the second time, he made an unexpected attack.

As fast as it had moved a few weeks previously, the front rolled back again. The defenders of Tobruk once again took up their posts on the perimeter. The fourth company of the Czechoslovak regiment occupied strong-points near the Derna road and in part of the harbour. The other companies took up positions on the El Akroma airfield and round the hill El Medaunar, where the Czechoslovak regiment command was stationed. The regiment was attached to the 38th Indian Brigade, and thus the Czechoslovaks became comrades-in-arms of dark-skinned fighters from the Punjab and intrepid Ghurkas, who had shortly before relieved the Australians.

At the beginning of February the front reached the neighbourhood of Tobruk. A decisive battle fought between Tmini and Gazala succeeded in halting the German advance. Then the front became stable for several months and both sides began to prepare for a new clash. The Allies took up their positions 70 kilometres west of Tobruk on a line from El Gazala through Akroma to Bir Hakeim. Meanwhile Rommel had succeeded in getting together a strong military force which at dawn on May 27th he hurled into a large-scale campaign the aim of which was nothing less than Suez. It was the same day that Heydrich was assassinated in Prague...

For three days a violent battle raged between Bir Hakeim and Akroma, and between El Adem and the broad minefields which stretched for about forty-five kilometres to the west. When the French garrison in Bir Hakeim was overcome the battle moved to the coast road in the neighbourhood of El Gazala. The battle was undecided until June 13th, but that day brought about a critical change. Of three hundred British tanks sent into battle that day only seventy remained by nightfall. It was a terrible blow, all the more so as Rommel's panzer army had suffered only slight losses. After breaking through the original positions Rommel succeeded in an encircling manoeuvre which sealed the fate of Tobruk. German panzer units used the new road to get far into the rear of the British army and launched a sharp attack on Tobruk. This time the garrison could not hold out.

At half past nine on the morning of June 20th the order was given to surrender Tobruk, which only a short time previously had endured an eight months' seige. The swastika flag once more flew over the ruins of the town and 25,000 prisoners fell into Axis hands. Five days later the head of Rommel's panzer column crossed the Egyptian frontier and on July 2nd appeared in El Alamein, sixty miles from Alexandria.

It was the heaviest blow Britain had suffered since the fall of France. On the day Rommel reached El Alamein Churchill said in the House of Commons: "Rommel has advanced nearly 400 miles through the desert, and is now approaching the fertile Delta of the Nile. The evil effects of these events, in Turkey, in Spain, in France and in French North Africa, cannot yet be measured."

But Rommel stopped at El Alamein. His motorised units were running out of petrol, which he would have needed for the final advance to Cairo. His desperate requests to Berlin for quicker supplies were in vain. After all, North Africa was only an incidental battlefield. The Soviet front, which had drained all the Nazi reserves to the last dregs, was calling for more men and supplies. At Stalingrad the halo of the invincible German army was already paling.

Rommel had to be content with the ration of petrol which would in any case have been sent to the North African front from the ports of Italy. Here the Italian resistance movement came into action. The workers loaded the waiting boats with full barrels, but when Rommel's soldiers opened them in Tobruk they found them full of water stinking of petrol. The Nazi panzers were running on their last drops.

Meanwhile Marshal Montgomery had succeeded in getting together enough supplies and fresh forces to start moving on October 23rd. It was an unequal contest. The British were able to throw into the battle practically the whole of their ground forces from Europe and Asia. On the other hand the Axis armies, concentrated on the eastern front, were taking a severe beating from the Soviet Army. Rommel's army was only a fraction of the European armies of the Axis and at the critical moment he was left without reinforcements. This was the beginning of the end for the Germans and Italians in Italy.

On November 13th the ruins of Tobruk passed into British hands for good; a week later the Germans cleared out of Benghazi, and in January 1943 the Eighth Army rolled through Tripoli to the Tunisian border.

And Churchill himself proclaimed in the House of Commons with rare outspokenness: "Only victory on the Russian front saved us from enemy invasion of all countries from the Levant to the Caspian, invasion of the Nile, of Iraq and of India."

Death lies in wait

Today the surroundings of Tobruk are mute and dead. From time to time on the road which winds round the harbour of Tobruk you may meet a

strange convoy. It drives along by the low wall of the petrol dump, on which the badges of all the units which ever fought in Tobruk are painted in giant colours. As the convoy reaches the hairpin bend Windy Corner, beneath the NAAFI building, it slows down almost to walking pace. The lorries drive about a hundred and sixty feet behind each other with the utmost care, and each of them carries a red flag and a notice in English saying: *Dangerous load*. It is indeed a dangerous load which makes this pilgrimage every day from the desert to the docks to disappear in the depths of the ocean.

There was perhaps no battlefield during the last war where such vast quantities of mines were used as in Cyrenaica. The endless spaces of the desert made extensive operations possible, because natural obstacles were few and far between; on the other hand there could be no digging in, no concrete fortifications, no Maginot lines, Atlantic walls, and no system of connected underground defences. All that had to be replaced by mines.

They were scattered far into the desert as well as along the roads and round important strategic points. Today, so many years after the last shot of the war was fired, these chrysalids of death still explode far out in the desert, from whence it is too far to carry loads of old mines and grenades to the harbour. When we arrived German prisoners were clearing one sector after another with the aid of mine detectors and anti-mine tanks with chain rollers.

Every day a hundred and fifty thousand kilogrammes of mines and other unexploded ammunition was taken from the collecting centres to the harbour in lorries, to be drowned in the deep sea. About the same amount was exploded every day in places too far away from the coast. In 1946 the daily figure reached a million kilogrammes.

Night and day millions of empty ammunition cases rattled through Tobruk harbour, brought by dozens of lorries. Below the El Medaunar hill in Palestrino, just where the Czechoslovak command had been, was an enormous collecting centre where mountains of war material was sorted. Steel, copper and lead were like a mysterious curse, tempting overseas merchants into the deserts of Libya. They flocked here like vultures to the graveyard of tanks, airoplanes, grenades, cannon and machinegun ammunition and military vehicles. They bought all this material from the British military authorities at ridiculously low prices.

Arab and negro workers here sorted the ammunition according to size, fired the fuses of these cases in which death still lurked unsatisfied, and filled hundreds and thousands of shot-pierced petrol cans with the material. They worked at piece rates -- for the armaments firms of Europe were impatiently waiting for this material. They worked for a few pence in the

burning heat of the sun, on mounds of explosives, without any health or safety measures, with no insurance against accidents which could not have been so probable and so frequent in any other work throughout Africa.

Night and day, beneath the glowing midday sun and by the light of ships' lamps tons of rattling ammunition disappeared into the insatiable maw of the boats — ammunition which had been brought here not so long ago under conditions of the greatest danger, through the mined harbour, constantly threatened by enemy planes and torpedoes. And now sailors of Panama, Belgian, Finnish and British shipping companies look on calmly while sweating Arab workers end the African pilgrimage of this death-bearing steel, copper and lead, for the sake of a few pence.

They closed the first cycle of this chrysalis of death. But in this very same harbour, under the cloak of military secrecy, barely two years after the end of the war and before the peace treaties have been signed, another cycle of death has started. It made on us the impression that the temporary rulers of this country considered the peace on the African battlefield to be nothing more than a cease-fire to allow them to collect their forces and get together thousands of tons of new ammunition. In this very harbour of Tobruk the purchasers of used war material assured us with satisfaction that this will not be their last deal. According to their information, which is certainly reliable, the warehouses of Tobruk and Benghazi which have been newly repaired are again being filled with fresh ammunition and "guaranteed reliable" explosives. The hundreds of thousands of tons of ammunition which have been cleared up during the four years since fighting ended in North Africa were not included in the new munitions dumps. They were not reliable enough — and then, they had already been paid for once by the warring states. So they had to make way for new supplies on which a profit could still be made.

Dvořák's New World Symphony in the ruins of Tobruk

While we were in Cyrenaica we saw more than once how Arab drivers would suddenly stop their vehicle in the middle of the desert near some tin hut which looked like a deserted strongpoint. There would be a sharp whistle, and a moment later an Arab would come out in front of the hut, give some prearranged signal, and in a minute or two would roll up a tank of petrol.

We were amazed, for at the entrance to all the bigger towns in Cyrenaica we had seen the English warning that the next petrol pumps were so many or so many miles away. The Arab drivers paid for this petrol bought "under the counter" a price which was only a fraction of the official price. We

could not understand this paradox, which we found inexplicable in the history of the black market.

We found the explanation in Tobruk. There were more than four thousand Germans here, war prisoners. They were free to move about, and in their camps had their own armed guards. Certain hours were reserved for them in the harbour when they were free to bathe and lie in the sun. We saw them standing in a queue waiting to go into the newly equipped cinema to see the latest German film.

We were invited to an evening of gramophone music in the cinema. The Germans sat in the pit, the English sat in the balcony. Together they listened to the works of Schubert, Sibelius, Haydn and Dvořák. There was an introduction to each composition, given in English and German. When the last notes of Dvořák's New World Symphony died away and we came out into the ruins of Tobruk lit by the dead white light of the moon, our thoughts turned to the prisoner of war camps in Germany during the war.

Later we talked to several of the prisoners. A twenty-three-year-old Berliner who had been three years in a concentration camp for "race defilement" and then had been sent to the front in a punishment detachment made no secret of his hostility towards those who were holding him prisoner.

"If we had known how the British and American were going to treat us we should have gone on fighting. They promised us a better future and here we are, worse off than under Hitler . . ."

That was how a German prisoner of war spoke as he came out of a concert hall by the side of his former enemy. We turned to a more prosaic question in order to complete our picture.

"How much meat do you get a month?"

"Kommt gar nicht in Frage, jede Menge, die ich will," was the irritable answer.

"Do you know your countrymen in Munich only get six hundred grammes a month?"

"I know that — it's because we didn't go on fighting", he snapped at us angrily.

We did not ask any more questions. What we had heard was enough to complete our picture of these fanatical Germans who as prisoners had never even known what it was to be hungry.

The occupants of the British camp in Tobruk were only a fraction of the whole number. And even from the British we heard that half-forgotten phrase from the Nazi war reports: "Tobruk fest in deutscher Hand".

After the war, too, Tobruk was firmly in German hands.

Arab merchants got everything they wanted from the German prisoners,

from chocolate to tons of petrol. The prisoners themselves let us into the secret of their big business transactions. The petrol, which was stolen from tank lorries, they sold wholesale on the black market for three or four shillings a ton, i. e. sixty to eighty hallers a litre. If it happened that the Arab merchants did not drive out into the desert to the appointed place in time, the prisoners poured their whole load of petrol into the sand so as not to be caught with it by the guard on their return.

And if some minor official of the British authorities in Tobruk wanted a piece of chocolate or a better sample of tinned food, he could only get it from a prisoner by paying hard currency. The Germans in the Tobruk prison camp needed nothing else and would accept nothing else.

80,000 graves

All along the coast of North Africa from the Mareth line on Tunisian territory to El Alamein in Egypt you will find military cemeteries, simple white crosses standing in long straight lines. Over 80,000 of them lie scattered along the main line of communication along the coast, just as they lie far inland where hardly anybody goes nowadays. We visited a military cemetery not far from Tobruk. Thousands of crosses, and above them the British flag flying. The setting sun, which was just going down between the wrecked ships in the harbour of Tobruk, coloured the white crosses red. Down there in the long arm of the harbour the wreck of a steamer which once upon a time breasted the waters of the Yangtse-Kiang now sticks up out of the sea. Near it lies an Italian torpedo-boat, a light Australian cruiser, Polish and English ships — and even American Liberty ships.

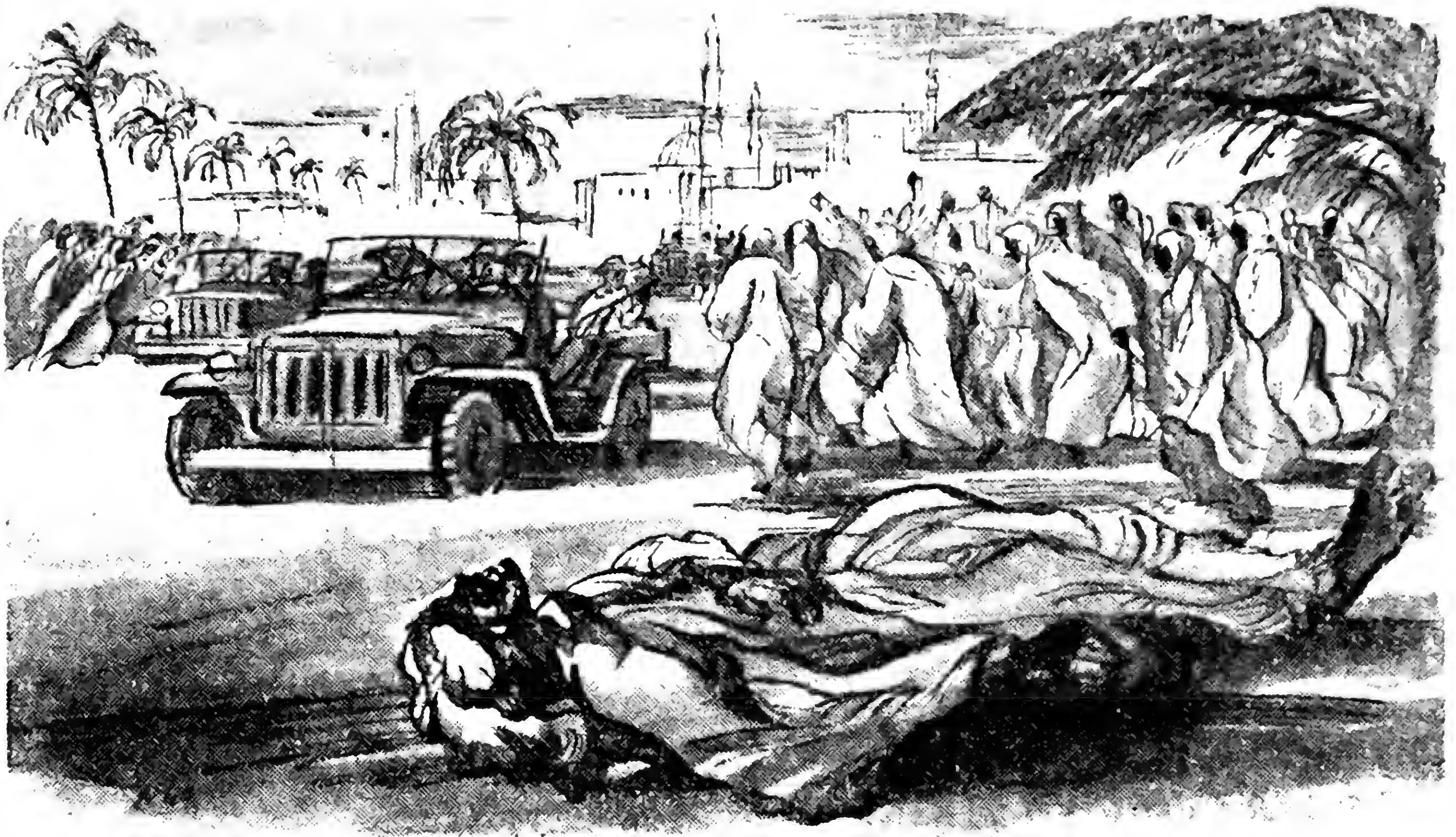
Up here we read the names on the crosses of Christians: Irish, New Zealanders, Poles, British, South Africans and Czechoslovaks, and near by wooden plaques bearing the word *Hindu* or *Moslem* or with the five-pointed Jewish star. Most of the dates beneath the names recall the the furious battle of June 13th 1942 and the next few days, which brought one sad chapter of Tobruk's history to a close.

In the north-west part of the cemetery is a stone memorial bearing the state emblem of Czechoslovakia wreathed with lime leaves. And beneath it is a long list of the names of those who came here to the continent of Africa to revenge, far from their homes, their murdered fathers, wives, and sweethearts. They died just at the very time when in Prague furious persecution of their helpless families was raging, revenge for the death of Heydrich.

We found rows of crosses with Czech names, and on the stone memorial are the names of those whose bodies were never found. They were blown up by mines, swept into the sea by the cloudburst which swept this part of the front one November night in 1941, or swallowed by the whirlpools sucking round the boats torpedoed in the bay.

Private Haas, Sergeant Roznětínský, Private Kijovič, and many others. Their more fortunate comrades who survived the bitter battles round Tobruk bade them farewell in a few brief words: "They fell and died, obedient to their country's laws."





Chapter Seven

QUO VADIS, LIBYA?

At the time when we drove through Libya — in the summer of 1947 — the situation in the country could be characterised by one word: confusion.

One bloody quarrel between the armed powers for the right to rule the coast of North Africa had barely ended, and another was already beginning. It was just as bitter a struggle, although it remained hidden beneath the surface. From time to time opposing interests clashed openly. Sparks flew, an echo of the affair was heard in the world press, and the struggle sank once more below the surface. The dramatic tempo of international events of greater importance distracted people's attention for a long time from these little known deserts on the north coast of Africa.

And yet even in 1947 an observer on the spot who had even the smallest powers of observation must have reached conclusions which boded no good.

According to international agreement the British forces should have left Libya in 1947. They had not left much later, even.

Why?

Sick strategy

It is sufficient to take a quick look at the map of Africa.

During recent years Great Britain has been losing her firm hold over Egypt, and therefore is trying to replace the base she is losing in the south east Mediterranean by another which would still enable her to control the shortest sea route from Europe to the Indian Ocean.

But Great Britain is concerned with something else too. At Fashoda in 1898 she gained control over a connected belt of territory stretching from the Mediterranean right to the Cape of Good Hope. The focus of interest in Africa at that time was Sudan, where the interests of England clashed with those of France. At Fashoda Lord Kitchener seized control over the Sudan for Britain and pushed Marchand's French forces to the west.

In recent years one of the most important links in this chain of territories under British control has been slipping out — Egypt. The British are looking for a substitute. The magic charm in their strategy is the strategically important oasis of Kufra, on the road from Cyrenaica to the Sudan. By strengthening her power in Cyrenaica Great Britain would be able to maintain undisturbed her control over an unbroken stretch of territory from the north of Africa to its most southern point.

After spending ten weeks in Libya we could see at every step how Great Britain had started putting her plan into practice with cold calculation in the very first years after the war. After two years of post-war occupation the results of this policy could be clearly seen throughout Libya. For the first time in our lives we were able to watch at close quarters the struggle of a European power to gain control over a colony.

Great Britain was not counting on Tripolitania for good so she concentrated on getting what she could out of her temporary position of power, while at the same time so undermining the economy of the country and disturbing its internal structure that later on it could be easily influenced from the more completely subjugated neighbouring colony of Cyrenaica.

In Tripolitania we did not find a single yard of road which had been repaired. The telephone wires, which in many places had been damaged by war operations, had been pulled down and the material sold to Egyptian buyers by the ton. Foreign trade was so firmly held by the British that even relations with Italy or the neighbouring French colonies were maintained only through London. In Tripolitania we found the same political picture as elsewhere in Africa where the territory was controlled by Britain. After two years of their rule the Arabs were hostile to the Italians, the Jews to the Arabs, the Arabs to the Berbers, and the Italians to the Jews.

The British military authorities allowed the Italians to have only one cultural and one physical training organisation. They disbanded all political organisations, but on the other hand they took not the smallest step towards re-educating the whole of the younger generation, fanatics brought up in the Balilla, and made no attempt to change the fascist appearance of the whole colony. They were content with having used their period of rule to break the political power of the Italians in Tripolitania, because the latter might threaten the position of Great Britain in later years. In contrast to this tendency, four political "clubs" were founded, the members being for the most part the Arabs who enjoyed economic and therefore also political power. The first "club" fostered the idea of the independence of Tripolitania, naturally under the rule of their own members. The second wanted independence for the whole of Libya, the third would have liked to see both the colonies, Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, united with Egypt. And the fourth contented itself with the remaining possibilities and at the same time sympathised with the Arab League.

Not one of these clubs had any influence on the real course of events in Libya. The one effective person in each was the British Commissioner, whose presence was the first condition for any meeting to be held. But even resolutions approved by the Commissioner had no more than an advisory character. Great Britain thus easily played her part of the governess who lets her unruly charges run wild in the playground but is careful not to let them on to the grass in the park.

The Libyan workers, Arabs, Berbers, Jews, and poor Italians, were the ones who suffered by this solution. After the fall of the premature Italian "Empire" its economic consequences became manifest. The bubble burst, and the greater part of the Libyan population remained with empty hands and an empty belly.

Now they are oppressed from three quarters. The British, the wealthy Italian landowners, and the Arab merchants are waging a bitter struggle amongst themselves for the remains of the wealth still to be squeezed out of the soil of Tripolitania and out of her working people. Three cocks on one dung-heap, and not one of them is satisfied. All three therefore try to make up for it at the expense of the workers in the towns and in the country by pushing wages down to a crazy level.

Cyrenaica offered a different picture, for Great Britain aimed at achieving permanent power here in the interests of her strategic plans. Here we saw roads repaired, new telephone wires, plantations properly kept up and a firm administration. The Italians had been squeezed out of Cyrenaica almost without exception, into economically ruined Tripolitania. Cyrenaica to

all appearances remained the domain of the fighting Arab tribe, the Senussi. Great Britain could not have chosen a more passionate enemy of the former Italian masters of the colony.

Recipe for kings

The Senussi resisted the colonising and "pacifying" efforts of Italy for a long time. Their rising was put down with great loss of life. Hundreds of the men of the tribe fell victim to public executions and punitive military expeditions as a warning to the rest. Great Britain systematically prepared them, all the time of the African campaign, for their future role of purely formal but nevertheless ruthless rulers.

In the course of the war the rulers of Cyrenaica changed six times; the Germans brought the Italians, the British the Senussi. The British did nothing to restrain the Senussis' desire for revenge; when the situation changed again the Italians started reprisals. With each change of masters the terror grew more intense. And when the British settled in Cyrenaica for good after El Alamein, the Italians fled from Cyrenaica to a man, for fear of the bloody revenge of the Senussi.

At the head of this tribe of a quarter of a million nomads stands Emir Sayid Mohammed Idris el Mahdi es Senussi, the "descendant of the Prophet". His life has been as crooked as it has been exciting. When the Italians invaded Cyrenaica he rose against them. Then he suddenly deserted his tribe and allied himself with the Italians against his own people. On his road to the throne of Cyrenaica, however, he had to change masters several times. After a short period of alliance with the Turks he sought the favour of the English, the Americans, and even the open support of the Arab League. Freedom for his tribe and for the rest of the people of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania was always a mere excuse in his struggle for personal power.

He first felt the thrill of power in his hands in 1917, when he became the Great Senussi, the head of the tribe.

After the Italian occupation of Cyrenaica and in agreement with the Italians he left his fellow-tribesmen to the mercies of their ruthless new rulers and went into "exile". He lived in Alexandria until 1944, when he was invited by the British to return to Cyrenaica.

He returned to old friends. The British began their co-operation with the Great Senussi as early as the time of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia. They gained his friendship then by a trifling gift - private aeroplane. In 1942 Anthony Eden solemnly proclaimed that Cyrenaica would never be an

Italian colony. He promised the royal throne to his British protégé, the Great Senussi.

The King of England shortly afterwards made Emir Senussi a Knight of the British Empire. In this way Great Britain hoped to secure a Cyrenaican equivalent of King Abdullah of Transjordan or the former King Faisal of Iraq.

The British imperialists dragged out of their archives a well-tried recipe for kings and decided to adopt the same tactics as nearly thirty years before, when they wanted to make sure of the eastern approaches to the Suez. Then — in March 1921 — the Cairo conference of British governors and high generals in the Near East, under the chairmanship of Winston Churchill, agreed to make a puppet king for the new throne of Iraq. In London they sought out Emir Faisal, the son of King Hussein of the Hejaz; British funds were used to found a number of newspapers and political parties which were to prepare the ground among the people of Iraq for the new king; in less than five months from the date of the Cairo conference Faisal really did take his seat on the throne of Iraq. Beforehand he signed a mere trifle — that Britain would represent Iraq in the League of Nations.

Then it was a question mainly of Iraq petrol and the need to secure the eastern approaches to the Suez canal. Now it was to be a question of submarine and air bases on the shores of Cyrenaica, and the creation of an alternative strategical territory to take the place of the British military zone along the Suez, the fate of which hung in the balance.

And so it happened that when Senussi returned to Cyrenaica from his Egyptian exile he was welcomed home with all due ceremony. The British succeeded in gaining sympathy for him in Tripolitania as well. Step by step they went on strengthening their influence in Libya behind the backs of the United Nations, which had entrusted them with the temporary administration of the country.

Who will come out on top?

The events which followed in Libya, which we saw both from Africa and later America, fitted exactly into this framework. For four years the British were able to carry on their policy of delay. The fate of the former Italian colonies in North Africa was still unsettled. Or so it seemed.

In 1949 the disgusting squabble over Cyrenaica came to a head. In February the British government officially decided, without even consulting the Mandatory Commission of UNO, to make Cyrenaica a member of the British Empire. Even diplomatic circles in London were agreed that there

was no historical parallel for this British step. Bevin's and Sforza's plan for dividing the former Italian colonies in Africa between Great Britain, Italy and France, was finally sunk.

The British laid another card on the table, once more regardless of the fact that UNO had not yet decided the fate of the colony. On the first of July they "recognised" the independence of Cyrenaica. The status of this independent Cyrenaica was to be similar to that of Transjordan, which is in fact ruled by the British Foreign Minister.

On September 18th Emir Sayid es Senussi proclaimed the constitution, which had been drawn up during his visit to London. Among the Emir's rights was that of discarding the constitution whenever he felt like it, and declaring a state of emergency. According to this constitution an assembly of people's representatives was to be elected, but given only advisory powers. Emir Sayid es Senussi would thus become absolute monarch in Cyrenaica — and an absolutely devoted subject of Great Britain.

In November 1949, however, the final decision was taken in UNO. The whole of Libya was promised complete independence from the first of January 1952. For the time being the administration of the country was entrusted to a High Commissioner with an advisory council of representatives of USA, England, Italy, Egypt and Pakistan, together with representatives of Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and Fezzan. But the world press made no secret of the fact that in the end it was the United States that was settling down firmly on the shores of North Africa.

He who sows the wind . . .

For four years the fate of Libya was discussed. One part of it, Cyrenaica, eight times the size of our country, flew about like a football on the playing fields of the western powers. Only from time to time were the people who had been born in Cyrenaica allowed to lay their hands on the ball. And then only a few chosen people.

Over nine tenths of the people whose home Cyrenaica had been from time immemorial had no right to raise their voices when their fate and that of their country was being decided.

This immoral paradox was the logical result of the ignorance and divisions among the broad masses of the people of Libya. Not until 1948 did the people of Libya begin to wake up. In 1949 the existence of the "Union of the People" in Tripolitania was demonstrated by their first mass appearance, which was very well organised. Twenty thousand people staged a disciplined demonstration to demand the immediate independence of their country. The

British military authorities answered with tear-bombs and automatic weapons. Thirteen dead and seriously wounded were left lying in the streets of Tripoli.

In their fear of the growing popular movement the British formed the "Cyrenaican Army" at the beginning of 1950; it was intended for use against any individuals or groups among the population of Libya who might act against the "interests" of Britain and USA in Libya.

Every time you hear the word Libya on the air or see it in the newspapers you see once more in your mind's eye the people who live there — poor people, down-trodden by the pre-war "pacification" of their country, by the long years of war terror, and by the new oppression which has followed the war. Their poor homes were destroyed by bombs and hand-grenades. The death-chrysalids of mines still lie in wait for them and their sheep and camels on their pasture grounds. The colonisers have driven them away from the life-giving wells, the fertile oases and the pastures. They can work there — for a weekly wage which is just enough to buy five pounds of bread. And against their will new foreigners are settling in their country, foreigners who want to turn their country into a new seed-bed of death and destruction, who are driving them from the fertile land again and who shoot all who rise in opposition and want to run their country for themselves.

These are still few, for the people of Libya are only beginning to come out of their stupor. They are looking round and gathering their forces. But one day they will rule their own country, not by the kindness of overseas powers, but by their own free will.





Chapter Eight

THE NILE DELTA

Ninety-nine out of a hundred visitors to Egypt enter the country either over the gangways in the docks of Alexandria or Port Said, or down the portable steps wheeled up to the giants of the air which land on the Cairo airfield. Tropical rains in neighbouring Sudan during the summer months stand in the way of the few daring motorists who venture to try the few hundred kilometres of soft sand in Upper Egypt and approach from the south. The burning basin of Palestine on the Asian side closes the country almost hermetically from the east. Over the western frontier at Sollum come only the sheep and goatherds driving in from Cyrenaica on heavy lorries, and here and there a solitary Englishman in civvies, for whom the Egyptian government has made an exception and provided a visa.

Throughout the whole of Cyrenaica you will hardly ever see a European visitor. Only a few merchants who have bought the remains of war material from the British military authorities supervise the loading in one or other of the ports. And so when we asked the Cyrenaica police authorities in Benghazi to endorse our passports we caused no little excitement. The British

commander of the police could not conceal his indignation that the British consulate in Algiers had issued us a transit visa without asking Benghazi. While we were there official telegrams simply rained in from all sides and in the end it was made pretty clear to us that it would be best if we disappeared from Benghazi as quickly as possible.

Foreign tourists are not welcome in Cyrenaica today, and the English have clearly many reasons for their attitude.

An unusual welcome

Towards evening we reached the Cyrenaica frontier at Capuzzo. The sun was just setting behind the frontier barrier as the young Arab frontier guards came to meet us. The formalities did not last long, and their initial misgivings soon gave way to friendly conversation. And the next minute we were standing on Egyptian soil for the first time. We were not greeted by the wailing of ships' sirens and the rush and bustle of port life, nor by the thundering of aircraft engines.

The quiet of evening fell upon the desert and the grey strip of the asphalt divided the world into two similar halves. A few steps away from the Egyptian frontier post, built like a long half-cylinder of corrugated iron, blue smoke was rising towards the sky. The post was empty. The day of fasting was over and the frontier guards had more important things on hand than examining the passports of two Europeans who were asking for them to be stamped so that they could continue on their journey. We could not be annoyed with them for their stoical calm, when we saw them baking bread at their open fire. One of them with a smile of contentment was rolling a piece of dough on rough canvas with a roughly made roller, and handing it to another who placed the piece of dough on a rusty petrol can lid and held it over the flames. The word "hurry" certainly does not exist in the vocabulary of these dark-skinned descendants of the ancient Egyptians, who hardly know how to hold a pencil and write down in straggling figures the licence numbers of the cars which pass the post.

In the end we had to spend the night under the starry Egyptian sky after all, because no car is allowed to cross the frontier after sunset. Down below, in Sollum, where the customs post is, office hours were over too, and so we should have had in any case to spend the night somewhere on the road or in the damp sand of the desert. High above our heads twinkled millions of clear bright stars. The Milky Way gleamed like a giant neon-light reflecting the scattered glow of distant great cities from one end of the universe to

the other. The Great Bear seemed bigger than over Europe. It sloped down somewhere over Bardia, where the sea was breaking against the rocky cliffs. Arab shepherds sat in silence round the leaping flames and tore pieces of roast meat from the sheep hanging on the spit. From the cooling sand came a breath of damp . . .

At dawn we went out into the desert. A solitary white cross in the distance gleamed in the early morning light. We approached it slowly along the path the frontier guards used on their camels, where there was no danger from mines. We got as far as a broken military lorry and a few yards beyond it — what we saw sent a shiver down our backs . . .

It was a symbol which was all too significant of all that we had seen as we drove through the battlefields of North Africa. A shot-pierced helmet hung askew on a wooden cross from which the name had long since disappeared. Beneath the cross we saw the whitened skull and a few of the bones of the man who had once worn the helmet. Round the grave were the tracks of the jackals which came by night to dig up the remains of the dead man from the sand.

A symbol.

This solitary grave on the Egyptian frontier was a forerunner of all those tens of thousands spread on either side. An unknown soldier; a man who came to Cyrenaica to die, to Cyrenaica whose name perhaps called up to him long ago in school romantic visions of heat and smooth sand dunes.

We laid the whitened skull and the bones deep in the sand with the aid of a field spade we found sticking half out of the desert. Somewhere far on the other side beyond the road the sky grew red and the sun threw its first rays over the formless yellow sands.

Cyrenaica was bidding us farewell.

Banana fields between houses and tramcars

The road from Tobruk goes slowly, almost unnoticeably up to the high plateau. On the left in the distance gleam the white walls of Bardia between the steep gullies dropping down to the hidden harbour. Beyond Capuzzo an enchanting sight suddenly opens before you. The infinite blue of the Mediterranean stretches far into the distance, framed by the open arms of Sollum bay. The rugged cliffs fall sheer to the sea. The road which is the one link between Cyrenaica and Egypt winds round sharp hairpin bends over slopes cut across by erosion and bomb craters. Several of the bends were blown up during the fighting and you can still see the debris far down below in the

valley. Temporary new banks have been built up by the side of deep craters, and the heavy lorries with their trailers drive very carefully at a snail's pace down to the coastal plain, where a few ruined houses and military posts can be seen.

Sollum.

Almost half the revenue of Egypt is covered by direct customs duties. Travellers who arrive at the airfield in New Heliopolis will tell you how strict the customs examination is there. Egypt needs funds to meet her growing state expenses. We saw convincing proof of this in Sollum, the very first day of our stay on Egyptian soil. The customs officials poked carefully every inch of the great bundles of straw and hay the cattle merchants from Cyrenaica carry with them on the ten-ton Fiats. The dozens of starving sheep and goats which are waiting to be fed somewhere in Marsa Matruh before they are left in the marketplace look on dully while the Egyptian customs men search their fodder diligently for contraband — opium. Not even the drivers' modest bundles beneath the cabin seats escaped their attention.

Beyond El Alamein the last traces of the war disappear. The war-wrecked vehicles which have accompanied you along the roadside for thousands of miles are gone. You see the first train again for a long time, setting out on its daily eight-hour pilgrimage from Marsa Matruh to Alexandria.

Here ended our exciting odyssey among the stinking animals with whom we had shared the overcrowded space of the lorries. For the first time for days we could stretch our cramped limbs and walk about. The Arab merchant from Derna, with whose load we had travelled, stood looking at us embarrassedly as we stood on the platform by our piles of luggage.

"Sono i miei ultimi piastri," he said, turning his pockets inside out to show us that he had really changed his last piastre for our pounds. There was no possibility of getting hold of Egyptian currency and the train was due to leave in half an hour. "If you could wait until tomorrow I shall be able to change as much as you want," said Djerbi Azzizi, and pointed to his flocks. "I shall sell it all this afternoon and then I'll have enough piastres..."

We tried to persuade the guard and the engine-driver, the station-master, the police-man and the signalman. Nobody wanted to take English pounds...

"So we'll pay you all the piastres we've got and leave our pounds with you. There's sure to be a currency exchange on the station in Alexandria." In vain.

Not until the last minute would the guard change his mind, and of course he wanted a fat baksheesh for it. Our luggage disappeared into the van and a soldier with a rifle came to sit with us to make sure we didn't run away on the journey...

the other. The Great Bear seemed bigger than over Europe. It sloped down somewhere over Bardia, where the sea was breaking against the rocky cliffs. Arab shepherds sat in silence round the leaping flames and tore pieces of roast meat from the sheep hanging on the spit. From the cooling sand came a breath of damp . . .

At dawn we went out into the desert. A solitary white cross in the distance gleamed in the early morning light. We approached it slowly along the path the frontier guards used on their camels, where there was no danger from mines. We got as far as a broken military lorry and a few yards beyond it — what we saw sent a shiver down our backs . . .

It was a symbol which was all too significant of all that we had seen as we drove through the battlefields of North Africa. A shot-pierced helmet hung askew on a wooden cross from which the name had long since disappeared. Beneath the cross we saw the whitened skull and a few of the bones of the man who had once worn the helmet. Round the grave were the tracks of the jackals which came by night to dig up the remains of the dead man from the sand.

A symbol.

This solitary grave on the Egyptian frontier was a forerunner of all those tens of thousands spread on either side. An unknown soldier; a man who came to Cyrenaica to die, to Cyrenaica whose name perhaps called up to him long ago in school romantic visions of heat and smooth sand dunes.

We laid the whitened skull and the bones deep in the sand with the aid of a field spade we found sticking half out of the desert. Somewhere far on the other side beyond the road the sky grew red and the sun threw its first rays over the formless yellow sands.

Cyrenaica was bidding us farewell.

Banana fields between houses and tramcars

The road from Tobruk goes slowly, almost unnoticeably up to the high plateau. On the left in the distance gleam the white walls of Bardia between the steep gullies dropping down to the hidden harbour. Beyond Capuzzo an enchanting sight suddenly opens before you. The infinite blue of the Mediterranean stretches far into the distance, framed by the open arms of Sollum bay. The rugged cliffs fall sheer to the sea. The road which is the one link between Cyrenaica and Egypt winds round sharp hairpin bends over slopes cut across by erosion and bomb craters. Several of the bends were blown up during the fighting and you can still see the debris far down below in the

valley. Temporary new banks have been built up by the side of deep craters, and the heavy lorries with their trailers drive very carefully at a snail's pace down to the coastal plain, where a few ruined houses and military posts can be seen.

Sollum.

Almost half the revenue of Egypt is covered by direct customs duties. Travellers who arrive at the airfield in New Heliopolis will tell you how strict the customs examination is there. Egypt needs funds to meet her growing state expenses. We saw convincing proof of this in Sollum, the very first day of our stay on Egyptian soil. The customs officials poked carefully every inch of the great bundles of straw and hay the cattle merchants from Cyrenaica carry with them on the ten-ton Fiats. The dozens of starving sheep and goats which are waiting to be fed somewhere in Marsa Matruh before they are left in the marketplace look on dully while the Egyptian customs men search their fodder diligently for contraband — opium. Not even the drivers' modest bundles beneath the cabin seats escaped their attention.

Beyond El Alamein the last traces of the war disappear. The war-wrecked vehicles which have accompanied you along the roadside for thousands of miles are gone. You see the first train again for a long time, setting out on its daily eight-hour pilgrimage from Marsa Matruh to Alexandria.

Here ended our exciting odyssey among the stinking animals with whom we had shared the overcrowded space of the lorries. For the first time for days we could stretch our cramped limbs and walk about. The Arab merchant from Derna, with whose load we had travelled, stood looking at us embarrassedly as we stood on the platform by our piles of luggage.

"*Sono i miei ultimi piastri*," he said, turning his pockets inside out to show us that he had really changed his last piastre for our pounds. There was no possibility of getting hold of Egyptian currency and the train was due to leave in half an hour. "If you could wait until tomorrow I shall be able to change as much as you want," said Djerbi Azzizi, and pointed to his flocks. "I shall sell it all this afternoon and then I'll have enough piastres . . ."

We tried to persuade the guard and the engine-driver, the station-master, the police-man and the signalman. Nobody wanted to take English pounds . . .

"So we'll pay you all the piastres we've got and leave our pounds with you. There's sure to be a currency exchange on the station in Alexandria." In vain.

Not until the last minute would the guard change his mind, and of course he wanted a fat baksheesh for it. Our luggage disappeared into the van and a soldier with a rifle came to sit with us to make sure we didn't run away on the journey . . .

The train swayed from side to side; Egyptians in long *gallabiahs* kept walking along the open coaches and shouting at each other from one carriage to the next. All at once sacks, bundles and parcels began flying down from the open platform of the wagons. You might have thought it was the result of some fight, but you soon see that this is the way the easy-going Egyptians save themselves the trouble of carrying their luggage from the distant railway station to their homes scattered along the railway line.

A few kilometres before you reach Alexandria the landscape suddenly changes as if touched by a magic wand. The desert suddenly stops and luscious greenery takes its place. You are coming into the fertile delta of the Nile. You realise at once from where the proverbial wealth of Egypt comes. Ninety-six and a half per cent of the area of this vast land is taken up by barren desert. You would expect such a disproportion between the extent of the desert and of the fertile land to lead to slow death, and yet the *fellahin* have been living for hundreds and thousands of years on the same narrow strip of land along the banks of the Nile and their families have multiplied. Five thousand two hundred people live on each square kilometre of land between the branches of the river which brings them life from Lake Victoria, from the slopes of the Abyssinian mountains and from the endless plains of the Sudan and Upper Egypt.

Endless stretches of maize and cotton fields. Date palms. Rice fields. Hectares of ground-nut plantations. Orchards. Banana groves. Land divided up into tiny square fields.

You see ragged children turning the handle of long wooden cylinders with the lower end plunged into the irrigation canals. The water comes up through a screw spiral inside the cylinder, over the low bank of earth, to bring life to the tiny fields. And near by on the steep river bank a *fellah* is drawing the sap of life into the tiny fields entrusted to him by means of a primitive pump — a *shadoof* — just as his forefathers did when they were forced to feed the builders of the Pyramids . . .

Houses suddenly spring up among the network of canals, strips of road and railway tracks. They spring up suddenly, with incomprehensible haste. Slapped together out of mud, with typical bamboo walls and piles of stinking rubbish. The suburbs of Alexandria. All at once you catch sight of modern buildings several stories high; right up against the electric cables you see clumps of ripening bananas half hidden in their giant green leaves. Here every square yard of soil is precious, and so the banana trees have moved right into the centre of Alexandria; they will soon be pushed back again by the feverish building going on. Together with the tall many-storied buildings of reinforced concrete they form as strange a synthesis of the twentieth

century as do the heavy two-wheeled carts drawn by waterbuffaloes with the Pullman cars which rush at ninety kilometres an hour every day between Cairo and Alexandria.

The city with the largest port in Africa

Thousands of years ago the ancient Egyptian obelisks with their gilded tops greeted the first rays of the sun-god Rê as he rose and at the end of the day sent his last greetings to the feet of the Pharaohs.

Instead of the gilded tops of the obelisks neon advertisements greet the visitor to Alexandria today, shooting high above the twelve-storey buildings lining the luxurious Corniche. As the last rays of the sun fade advertisements in Arabic, English and French start jumping about against the sky, and fade away only with the small hours for the Orient lives by night too. A giant symbol of the drink which took Egypt by storm, a neon bottle of COCA-COLA, gleams into the darkness of the night; it is an eloquent portent of America in the land of the Pyramids. The red booths where they sell this drink, which came to Egypt during the last war along with English and New Zealand troops and with American big businessmen in their role of organisers of military espionage, can be found on every corner. The sellers of this universal brown-coloured drink thread their way among the passers-by, carrying tin cases full of bottles and lumps of ice, and waving a wet glass in front of them. Egyptian boys in their long *gallabiabs* hang on to the steps of the overcrowded tramcars and yell their "Kuka-Kulaaa . . ." without intermission. For doing this all day they get a few miserable pence, and will gradually push the Egyptian sellers of local beer and lemonade off the streets. But the American shareholders and the big business men rub their hands contentedly, for Egypt is the first country on the African continent where their Coca-colonisation has succeeded in penetrating, after settling down firmly in the other four continents.

The face of Alexandria resembles Neptune, ruler of the seas. Life in the port is busy, fast, and restless, with a tempo which contrasts strangely with the stoical calm beyond the entrance to the port. This is the largest port in Africa, and the landing quays offer a variegated picture made up of the flags of all nations, the men of all races, and goods of all descriptions. The high warehouse charges and the even higher charges for storage and delayed delivery are that mysterious baton which sets the fast beat for the whole of this water-side anthill.

Day and night new ships keep coming in. American steamers with a con-

signment of machinery. A Chilean boat with saltpetre. The Poles have come in their own ships for cotton. Giant cranes drag out of the hold of another boat forty-ton express coaches which only a few weeks before ticked out their monotonous rhythm between the works where they were born and some English port. Their sides still smell of fresh paint. Dockworkers with great care remove the crane chains from giant blocks of Italian marble which will soon be gleaming somewhere on one of the boulevards of Alexandria or Cairo.

On the quays mountains of iron girders and reinforcements for building and mounds of sacks of cement grow up and disappear again. Miles of pipes for irrigation works and the Nile dams. Builders' timber. Tiles. Thousands of flat crates of plate glass. Giant crates, each bigger than a railway carriage, enclosing water turbines, electric motors and ships' engines.

Egypt grew immeasurably rich during the war. She became one of England's creditors and could pay for deliveries with hard currency. She opened wide her gates to foreign goods which she needs to build up and expand her industry.

The port of Alexandria and its quays full of goods would be an admirable lesson to all who send goods abroad. You stand amazed at the lack of care often given to the packing of goods. Streams of grain run from torn sacks. Egyptian dockworkers pile up flour and dust together in one heap, because the foreign exporter did not stop to think of the chain of hands, cranes and transport vehicles his goods would have to pass along. Broken sheets of asbestos. Broken crates of glass — all the labels in many languages warning that the goods inside were very fragile were not enough to strengthen the too-thin walls. Fragile crates of thin lathes without the necessary strengthening — and inside beautifully polished motor-cars. You can see them through innumerable openings — and also their irremediable battering; the giant crates had been crushed like a matchbox. The exporter had again forgotten that the crates are piled one on top of the other both in the holds of the ships and at the customs sheds. The perpetual rolling of the ships then puts the finishing touches to the process, which goes on echoing in piles of correspondence between insurance companies, exporters and consignees. We saw consignments of panels of rare Brazilian woods which had been reduced to heaps of useless waste because the exporter had tried to save on packing. Our hearts ached at the sight of crushed parcels of expensive art paper which the carelessness of the overseas exporter had turned into valueless rubbish.

As we leave the port of Alexandria the wailing of ships' sirens goes on ringing in our ears for long, together with the endless monotonous chanting

of the Arab labourers who get up their strength to lift the monstrous loads with the magic words that overcome the laws of weight:

"Mahshi, mahshi, mahshi . . ."

Security position ABC

The forest of cables which during the war years held the balloon barrage over the port of Alexandria, protecting the Achilles' heel of the Allied armies from enemy air attacks, have long since disappeared. All the anti-aircraft guns have disappeared from the luxury promenade Corniche and from the landing quays at the other end of the city. Even the British units have disappeared from the streets of Alexandria and moved a bit further away — to the "reserved" zone round Suez.

The surface of political life in Egypt reminds the European observer of the surface of a lake hidden among the mountains. Every now and again wild winds from the outside world cross the high mountain barriers and ruffle the whole surface. Another constant source of unrest are the invisible currents far below the surface. In the centre the waves surge wildly against each other and the ripples on the surface grow gradually wider and smaller until they disappear altogether, to appear again the next day at some quite different spot. The focal points of unrest here are Alexandria and Cairo, and here tension is always to be felt in the air.

You are walking along the promenade in Alexandria about eleven o'clock at night. Light is streaming from the open cafés and a rosy glow is dancing over the white crests of the waves far out to sea. The wreaths of shining lights draped round Alexandria's white brow are threaded with the ruby, sapphire and emerald of neon signs. *Sharbatli*, street-sellers in long *gallabiyahs* with enormous glass vessels of cool lemonade, beat time to their steps in syncopated rhythm as they clap two brass plates together.

Suddenly a policeman armed with a truncheon appears and warns you in bad English to go back to your hotel as quickly as possible.

"Situation A, demonstrations are expected . . ."

Danger for Europeans.

The waves thundering beyond the stone wall roll back with the ebbing tide and mingle with the rhythm of the jazz-bands. The cool wind blows millions of tiny drops of spray into your face. Thousands of tons of water, wave upon wave, roll over the surface of the sea and tirelessly beat against the concrete blocks in front of the sea wall. Blow follows blow, and the foam dashes thirty feet and more into the air.

"Situation A, return to your hotel at once, the authorities cannot answer for your lives today . . ."

When you have been some time in Egypt you get to know this well. It begins with a small group of people; their leader walks backwards in front of them chanting slogans to which they answer with rising passion. In a little while a powerful avalanche of people fills the street, bringing traffic to a dead stop and carrying with it everything that gets in its way. The police appear on the scene, armed with long truncheons and shields, and next day you read in the newspapers a short item about a clash between demonstrating crowds and the police in the Karmuz quarter, followed by figures of the dead and wounded.

"Situation A in Alexandria today! Clear the streets!"

Yesterday it was Situation B. In the security vocabulary of the Egyptian police that means that you could move about in the European quarter and that if you simply had to go into the Arab quarter you had to take with you an interpreter and guide in one person, who would protect you if the need arose. You can only go into the Arab quarter alone if it is Situation C.

You think Alexandria by night looks quite normal. There are children sleeping on the quayside by heaps of rubbish. *Sharbatli* with giant glass phials and lumps of ice walk about. In booths they are roasting heads of durra over hot coals. Burnt almonds are being sold in long paper cornets. There are only a few passengers in the modern double-decker trams. Slender minarets gleam in the half-dark of the streets. The screech of Arab music sounds among the swings and switchbacks in the square. The green state flag with its white crescent moon and three stars flies from the whirling roundabouts. The stream of cars has no end. Twenty-five kilometres of asphalt road lined on one side by the swelling sea and on the other by luxury hotels . . .

In an hour — or even in ten minutes — everything may come to a standstill, the streets may grow quiet and then fill with surging confusion and the sound of broken glass falling.

Today it is situation A in Alexandria.

Czechoslovakia in Egypt

We were sitting in the small Kodak Company's cinema preparing a commentary for the films we had made so far on our travels.

"Could you lend us a pencil?" we asked the young Armenian technician when we failed to find one in our pockets. He handed one to us with a smile,

the projector started turning and by the shaded light our shorthand notes were jotted down on paper. When the lights went up as the reels were changed we saw the words *Made in Czechoslovakia* on the pencil.

"Do people like buying Czech pencils here?" we broke the silence.

"Of course. They hardly buy any others. They have a good name and really have no competitors in Egypt . . ."

"These are pencils from our country . . ."

"You are Czechoslovaks?" he asked in surprise. "You'll find goods from your country everywhere here. Just go and look at the port and you'll see how much is being unloaded . . ."

A Czechoslovak pencil was enough to gain this young Armenian's confidence. He told us that in a few days a large transport of Armenian settlers would be leaving Egypt for the Soviet Union. Over eight hundred people who had lived here for many years and built up an important position for themselves in economic life had decided spontaneously to return to the Armenian Republic, to lend their experience and their knowledge to build up their Soviet homeland after the war.

"I say, can you tell me what Russian film production is like since the war?" He was silent for a moment and then went on: "You won't see Russian films here in Egypt, they don't get here. The Egyptians write congratulatory articles in the newspapers when the Soviet delegation votes in favour of Egyptian demands in Lake Success, but they won't let Russian films into Egypt."

We listened with interest.

"I have only seen one Russian film since the war. They showed it at the Soviet Embassy — "The Stone Flower", it was called. I should like to know whether all Russian films are so marvellous . . ."

We talked on.

"You know," he said in conclusion, "you may think it strange of me to ask all these questions. Next week the *Pobyeda* is going home . . . Home to a home I've never seen, because I was born here in Egypt. But I would like to work there in some film studio — I am good at my job. If I couldn't do that, I'd be willing to break stones on the roads — only to be among my own people . . ."

When we went to get some parcels through the customs at the New Heliopolis airfield we saw a lorry stop in front of the customs house shed; a few porters began hurriedly loading parcels. The pile grew.

The first, second, fifth, tenth parcel with the well-known label *Tesla* and another bearing the words *Made in Czechoslovakia*. Samples of bijouterie from Jablonec. Samples from Czechoslovak textile factories.

"Attention! Do not drop! Glassware!"

And then again: *Made in Czechoslovakia*. We traced with interest the destinations of these goods. On one side rose a pile of parcels for Egypt. The other pile was considerably larger: Johannesburg, Nairobi, Durban, Cape Town, Mombasa, Addis Ababa. And Johannesburg again.

We learned that a plane of the Czechoslovak Air Lines had landed a few minutes previously, fully laden as usual. The whole of the utilisable space of the plane was filled with parcels of goods seeking new paths into this wealthy continent which was starving for goods. The high tariffs for air transport are worth paying; the parcels lie only for an hour or so in the customs house sheds before they are seized by new hands, a lorry motor throbs, and in a few minutes another silver colossus glides up from the earth. Those are the British taking off for Cape Town, taking with them parcels handed over a few hours before by the Czechoslovak airmen. The rest will go on with a French plane whose final goal is Madagascar, and the few parcels marked *Addis Ababa* will be taken in charge by the Abyssinian Air Company.

How small the world is . . .

Four days from the moment when the Czech official stamped the consignment papers for a parcel on the Ruzyně airfield it will be opened by the purchaser on the counter of a shop where curly-headed ebony-faced Abyssinians look in through the window.

The port of Alexandria is like a fashion parade of goods bearing the words *Made in Czechoslovakia*. Motor-cars, machinery, glass, bijouterie, paper, textiles, leather goods. Innumerable crates of all sizes whose contents cannot be guessed at. Our goods are well-known here. They are as used to passing Czechoslovak goods through the Egyptian customs as they are Brazilian timber, American wheat, English railway coaches or Chilean saltpetre.

And yet we heard two complaints. Only a year before our arrival in Alexandria loads were still coming in from Czechoslovakia bearing the words *"Nicht stürzen!"* There was no label in English. The German labels provoked caustic comments from the prisoners-of-war working in the docks. The second complaint was as painful to us as the first. Sometimes a consignment of crates comes in where the net weight marked on the outer side of the crates differs by several kilogrammes from the weight given in the bill. This entails the considerable job of re-weighing all the crates; days of time are lost and large sums are deducted from the bill to cover storage costs and the wages of the workers engaged in transporting the crates to the warehouse, unpacking, weighing, and packing up again. And all this because somewhere in the accounts department of a large firm somebody found it too much

trouble to lift the telephone and ask the despatch office for the exact weight of the goods being despatched. Customs officials the world over are suspicious, but this cannot be the excuse for carelessness.

Czechoslovakia is seeking the way to world markets which were closed to her for the six years of the war. And she has found markets for her goods in spite of all the obstacles put in her way by the policy of discrimination adopted by her western competitors.





Chapter Nine

AN UPSIDE-DOWN WORLD

It is half past three in the morning. The printers' rotaries churn out thousands of copies of Arabic and European newspapers. In quiet hospital wards the night nurses go off duty. Bakers thrust the last loaves of bread into their ovens and the last trays of rolls, to have them ready in time to appear on shop counters and in the café bars.

The white men in the Arab quarter of this Mohammedan world are resting, getting up strength for another blazing hot day.

But the Arab world is alive. This is *ramadan*, the month of fasting.

Four weeks of hunger and thirst

On the morning of July the nineteenth the newspapers and the radio announced to the whole world of Islam from Pakistan below the Himalayas to the tiniest Moroccan hamlets on the Atlantic coast that *ramadan* had begun, the month when Allah sent the Koran to the believers on the earth.

At the moment when the crescent of the new moon appears on the night sky the Mohammedan world is turned upside down.

The night is turned into day and the day into night.

From sunrise to sunset no believer may touch either food or drink, he may not smoke nor may he have intercourse with a person of the opposite sex. We were amazed when we saw how fanatically the Arabs obey this stern commandment. Especially during the first days of *ramadan* we often saw them scarcely able to crawl along the heat-burned streets before sunset. It is difficult to imagine the degree of self-denial required for a man to refrain from touching water in a hundred and twenty degree heat-wave. Only children, the sick, and pregnant women are exempted from this cruel custom. Similarly Arabs who have to travel all day on camel-back are allowed to drink, but we met Arabs who of their own accord kept up *ramadan* even under these conditions. There can be no doubt that this fast was originally a kind of health measure intended to set some limit to the excessive use of food and drink in a hot climate, at least for a while. Such a fast incorporated into religious commandments with such severity might have had a beneficial effect centuries ago, but it has disastrous consequences nowadays, when frequently Islam finds itself running alongside modern European life.

On the way from Tripolitania to Cyrenaica we shared the back of a lorry with some Arab shepherds and Senussi soldiers. Every five minutes they asked us the time, although the sun was still high above the horizon. They were impatient to end their hunger strike, especially when they saw two "infidels" sitting in their midst and enjoying juicy fruit.

We drove into Barca shortly before sunset; it is a little town in Cyrenaica, not far from Benghazi. Exhausted Arabs were standing silently about in the streets, sitting on the ground, and waiting in front of the little cafés and along the walls of the houses. They were just waiting, but their waiting was not like ours. It was silent, hungry, exhausted, thirsty. All at once an air-raid warning sounded into the quiet of the evening. Our blood grew cold at the sound, even so many years after the end of the war. In Europe it meant death and destruction for us, but for the Arabs in Cyrenaica it meant the end of their misery. For a few seconds dark figures flew past us and nothing could be heard but the slap of bare feet. In a few moments not a soul remained on the streets. Deserted carts stood before the houses. And then you could hear the muffled sound of plates, mugs and glasses.

There, behind the windows of the Arab world, life began with the setting of the sun . . .

Ramadan is not a fixed month. Each year it is moved forward a few days because the Arab calendar does not agree with the Christian. Every

thirty-three years it falls at the same time. If it comes in the winter months it is more bearable, both for the cooler weather, and for the shorter days between sunrise and sunset.

But in the summer months *ramadan* means real suffering.

The street gets livelier after sunset. The screeching notes of Arab music can be heard from every corner. Hungry Arabs press round the sellers of fruit and of cakes floating in olive oil. People eat and drink all night long. Those who have enough money to be able to do without working during the day throughout *ramadan* lie down to sleep at dawn with over-full stomachs. But they are only a fraction of the numbers of the poor who live from hand to mouth and from day to day. Sleepless and unrested the Arabs go to work in the morning knowing that they will not be able to strengthen or refresh themselves all day. In Tobruk harbour we saw Arab workmen loading heavy barrels of ammunition; most of them could hardly keep on their feet — they were utterly exhausted.

But as soon as they have finished their heavy supper after sunset, which is meant to make up for the whole day's hunger, they begin to live again. They drink, celebrate and sing the whole night long. All through the Arab quarters gramophones can be heard grinding out their desperately monotonous music. It is quite impossible for the men to come to work next morning rested and strengthened.

We asked many Arabs why they kept *ramadan* so strictly. Many of them do so out of fear of the punishments which the head of the community, the sheik, can inflict on them. In the Mohammedan mind eighty-one strokes on the bare back is sufficient warning against transgressing *ramadan*. Many Arabs will not answer the question at all, for it would never occur to them to disobey this strict commandment of the Prophet. All Mohammedans without exception will tell you, however, that as a reward for their self-denial in this world they will be given eternal peace, plenty and good cheer in the next. You would be amazed at the small number of people who do not observe *ramadan*. And even then, if they have a drink or smoke a cigarette during the day they do so in secret, so as not to incur the scorn of their fellow-believers.

On the edge of this sad story of senseless fasting are written the names of those, and they are many, whose firm will or fear of punishment was stronger than their physical powers of resistance. But the strict Mohammedan faith does allow exceptions.

It is not at all rare for the faithful to faint after the long hours of fasting; they have then the slight hope that their suffering will end sooner than that of the rest. The procedure is very simple. Those who are in a slightly

better state put two rags in front of their exhausted fellow — one yellow and one red. If he is not capable of distinguishing between these two colours, then it is sufficient proof to end his sufferings for that day without punishment.

There are no statistics to show how many Arabs really faint and how many “lose their sight” only in order to be able to moisten their lips in cooling water.

Cannonade over Cairo

In Libya we were often told that in Egypt the question of *ramadan* was looked upon in a much more progressive light. The young people we met in Tripolitania, particularly, where the influence of Egyptian films is very strong, assured us that in Egypt we were hardly likely to see their fellow-believers observing *ramadan*.

Egypt gave us a clear answer to this point.

On the last lap of our odyssey without our Tatra — in the Alexandria-Cairo express — we started talking to the guard on the train. He too was waiting patiently for sunset, just like millions of poor *fellahin*. He was an intelligent young Egyptian, a weight-lifting champion who had represented Egypt at many international sports events.

“During *ramadan* I am in much better condition than at other times,” he confessed. “I think it is just the strict regular life that improves my performance during *ramadan* . . .”

So that was the answer to the question whether *ramadan* was only a survival in the more backward Mohammedan countries.

The fifteenth of August, the last day of *ramadan*, put an end to all doubts. The whole of Cairo celebrated this day in a way which exceeds all imagination. When in the first years of Hejira conquering Arab fanaticism set out on its victorious march from Mecca, one of Omar’s generals, Amr ibn al As, halted at the spot where Cairo stands today. Where his tent was pitched rose the first mosque in the land of Egypt. Every year this oldest Egyptian mosque is the scene of religious ceremonies at which the King himself is present. They bring the four-week fast to an end and mark the beginning of Lesser Bairam.

From the early hours of the morning crowds of the faithful thronged to the Amr ibn al As mosque. The police and the guard of honour came in lorries. The Royal Horse Guards were there, with their thorough-bred mounts, gleaming uniforms, and a forest of red and green flags. Every hundred yards or so there were triumphal arches. It was a fantastic contrast,

the reinforced concrete skyscrapers through which the royal procession was to pass from Abdin, and the bright-coloured embroidered baldaquins at the entrance to the mosque. Thousands of policemen in white uniforms with a red tarboosh lined the waiting crowds. All the streets the King was to pass along had been strewn with yellow sand brought from Alexandria. The balconies of the houses and the tops of the trees were festooned with the curious long before the ceremony in the mosque was due to begin.

We were the only European reporters who were able to watch this gay oriental drama from close quarters.

It wanted a few minutes to twelve. On the wide square in front of the mosque, similarly strewn with sand, was silence. Excitement. From time to time the commands of the officer of the Horse Guards would ring out, followed by carefully drilled movements and the raising of flags. The last of the faithful were entering the mosque. At the entrance a car would stop from time to time, for some high state official to step out. Behind would come a broken-down taxi and a group of Arabs would tumble out, carrying their prayer-mats under their arms, and fumbling under their *gallabiabs* for a few pence for the driver.

Beneath the gay baldequins at the entrance to the mosque the King was awaited by his Cabinet, the High Command, and representatives of public life. A row of gilt armchairs stood there, thick carpets, morning-coats, gold chains — excited silence. The silence was broken only by the occasional flapping of the green flags on their tall poles. Exactly at twelve o'clock the royal police sounded their klaxons in the square and a few red jeeps with snow-white stripes on their wheels appeared. A few seconds later the high Rolls Royce the King prefers for state occasions drew up in front of the mosque.

It was followed by a string of Cadillacs and Packards, all with black mudguards and red bonnets, sides and window frames. The royal arms gleamed in gold on the chrome wheel-hubs. The click of cameras and the buzz of film cameras mingled with sharp commands and military reports, and left hands flew to the salute. The national anthem rang out. With a few deft movements the footman took off the King's shoes for him to enter the mosque, followed by the Cabinet and the higher officials. The crowds in front of the mosque rejoiced, while in the twilight of the pillared mosque the quiet prayers of the last day of *ramadan* began: *ramadan*, which had turned the life of the Mohammedans upside down for four long weeks.

The same evening a salvo was fired over the skyscrapers and the slender minarets of Cairo, announcing the end of *ramadan*. We long thought over this iron law of the Koran, when the wreaths of lights shining on the mina-

ret galleries went out as the last shot died away. They had been shining there for four long weeks during *ramadan*, and they would light up again in eleven months time, when the Arab astronomers announced that the crescent of the new moon had appeared in the night sky, the new moon of *ramadan* . . .

Drinking water with sewage

The Egyptian *fellah* has amazing powers of resistance. Medical handbooks for tourists going to Egypt or the Sudan warn you anxiously against bathing in the Nile. The danger of bilharziasis, a disease which affects the bladder and kidneys, is too great for a European settled in Egypt to risk bathing in the Nile. The disease is caused by parasites which are caught on the skin and get into the organs through the blood stream. Hundreds of thousands of Egyptians suffer from a chronic form of this disease.

In September and October the Nile reaches its highest level. It spreads its waters far and wide and brings with it all the dirt, sewage and other deposits left by the whole year in Upper Egypt. In many places we saw the *fellahin* drinking water straight from the Nile. A few yards away their water-buffaloes were standing in the water. The stinking sewage from hundreds of thousands of unhygienic hovels finds its way into the same Nile whence they take water for drinking and cooking. The health authorities have recommended the use of large vessels of porous clay, which would automatically hold the dirt floating in the water; but it would be impossible by this means to get rid of the countless bacteria living in the water. The carelessness of the authorities and the lack of care devoted to health measures are often added to by the ignorance and backwardness of the people themselves. Not long ago, near Mansura, wells which had been sunk so that the *fellahin* would not have to drink water from the Nile were destroyed. Fanatical Egyptians destroyed them, because their belief in the life-giving power of the Nile was so deep that they attributed to well-water all their inherited malignant diseases and impotence as well.

You might expect that only the ignorant *fellahin* live like this. This illusion is destroyed by the sight you may see in the palm grove on the liveliest boulevard in Cairo. Here the gardeners employed by the city water the grass and flowers with dirty water which they drink as they go, with great enjoyment, to quench their thirst in the dreadful heat. A few steps away, in every house, is a tap with drinking water, but they prefer the dirt of the Nile.

The Nile brings life . . . But there are no Egyptian statistics to tell you to how many people it brings death every year.

Fighter planes and DDT

When the first signs of a cholera epidemic appeared in the provinces of Sharkia and Kaliubia, all the Cairo newspapers a week later printed under screaming headlines the news that a plane had landed on the New Heliopole airfield bringing the first consignment of anticholera serum. These eighty thousand ampules pushed political and economic news from all over the world right into the background. Egypt had been spared this scourge since 1902; a few years earlier, in 1882, it had wrought terrible losses among the population of Egypt. 1500 thousand victims a day was the death toll then, and the epidemic, which had been brought to the country by a Chinese seaman, raged unabated for eight whole months.

When we travelled from Port Said through Ismailia to Suez we had no idea that the focus of infection was in this region. The following day all traffic was stopped in the neighbouring provinces and all Egyptian boats were held up on the Ismailia canal. The same day large military detachments received orders to surround the village of Mostorod on the Ismailia canal, where a large number of cases had been reported. At two o'clock in the morning five hundred soldiers cut off the whole area, to prevent any movement of the population. But it turned out that the military had been sent to the threatened area without any health measures and even without supplies of food and drinking water. The men had to live on local supplies and drink the infected water. Not until a number of cases of sickness had been reported among the soldiers and the opposition newspapers accused the military authorities of gross neglect was anything done to "put things right". The Minister for War gave orders to recall all units from the environs of Mostorod and station them in their home garrisons.

That was the beginning of a terrible epidemic which aroused the people not only of Egypt but of all neighbouring countries and far abroad as well. The infected soldiers carried the disease from the original place of outbreak, and then it spread through the whole country like an avalanche. Under the pressure of public opinion abroad the government assigned half a million pounds for carrying on the fight against the epidemic, for foreign observers were carefully watching the clash between Egypt and England in the plenum of UNO. The whole of the press and the radio was full of warnings to observe the rules of cleanliness with the utmost care, to boil water before using, limiting the sale of fresh fruit and vegetables, and forbidding the production of ice-cream and the sale of cold drinks. All these measures had a grotesque ring, for they could only touch the population of the few towns, while the country people, more or less completely illiterate, remained without help.

Not many days before the epidemic of cholera broke out an important personage had assured us that the *fellahin* never drink the water of the Nile. On September 25th the newspapers reported the "large-scale operations" being undertaken to cope with cholera, accompanied by pictures with this commentary: "The people of Mostorod have got drinking water for the first time." And under the next picture: "This pump has been installed by the Ministry of Health, to limit the drinking of water from the canal."

Every day the newspapers reported a growing number of victims. The official reports quoted over a hundred deaths and dozens of suspected cases daily, but in fact the losses were far greater. The orthodox Mohammedans resisted the orders of the authorities to burn the corpses and tried all ways of getting round them. In Cairo itself cases were found where the victims of cholera were brought into the city hidden under fruit and vegetables in order to receive ritual burial in their family tombs. The epidemic spread rapidly through the provinces of Sharkia, Kaliubia and Ismailia, leaped from Cairo to Giza and thence to Alexandria; a few days later the first cases were reported in Luxor, seven hundred kilometres away.

All the neighbouring states gave orders to their embassies to stop the issue of visas. The commander of an Argentine warship on his way to Egypt on an official visit expressed his regret that circumstances prevented him from carrying out his intention, and changed course. The Egyptian government sent requests to foreign governments for the largest possible consignments of vaccine to help in overcoming the epidemic. Almost all the Cairo legations sent telegrams home to their governments for supplies of vaccine for their staff to be sent by air. The prices of anti-cholera serum shot up to fantastic heights. At the same time the government offered a reward for finding those who had put into circulation large quantities of false serum made from salt water.

We ourselves witnessed the crowds forcing their way into the the building of the Health Institute in Sharia Fallaki and demanding vaccination against cholera. That was in the first days of the epidemic, when the newspapers reported the arrival of the first consignments of serum from abroad. The police dispersed the crowds and there were frantic scenes of desperation.

All trains travelling through the province of Dakalia were strictly forbidden to slow down or stop. The newspapers reported the case of an engine-driver in the province of Benha who was arrested and sentenced to imprisonment for slowing down in the danger area and allowing several Egyptians to jump out. At the same time the first cases were reported from Palestine, brought in from Egypt.

At the beginning of October the situation improved for a time, but then

things took a turn for the worse. The death figures of the beginning of the epidemic, which were round about a hundred a day, suddenly rose and the official reports all at once quoted five hundred deaths and several hundred suspected cases. The spacious Cairo railway station emptied; all traffic was stopped to prevent the epidemic spreading further. From morning to night aircraft engines sounded over the city as planes sprayed liquid DDT over all quarters of the city to destroy pests. Nevertheless the infection went on spreading. The opposition paper *Al Kotla* accused the government of being responsible for the whole affair by its carelessness and untimely mobilisation measures.

In these days of tension our most valuable document was one in French and English which we had brought with us from Prague. It was a certificate from the State Health Institute in Prague that before leaving we had been vaccinated against cholera at the intervals laid down by international regulations. Against the cholera which for a time struck terror into the whole of the land of the Pyramids.

Egypt and the Security Council

There is a small colony of Brazilians scattered through the two-million antheap of Cairo. They have lived here for years in peace and quiet, for the most part representatives of trade firms, importers of coffee, owners of transport firms and small factories. On the luxurious Soliman Pasha boulevard you will find a small café where people stop for a frothy espresso or a cup of iced chocolate. Probably every visitor to Cairo has stopped at this elegant corner with the plastic letters **BRAZIL COFFEE STORES** over the entrance.

Today this name is a thing of the past. A few days after the Brazilian delegate had proposed in the Security Council that the conflict between England and Egypt over the British evacuation of the country and the uniting of the country with the Sudan should be taken off the agenda and left to direct negotiations between the two countries, the Brazilian Embassy in Cairo was attacked. All Brazilians received letters threatening reprisals for the proposal made by the Brazilian delegation in UNO. The tension which had accumulated all the time decision was being delayed on this delicate question, a decision the whole nation was waiting for, worked itself out on the Brazilians. The police had to defend them. The State Secretary for Foreign Affairs officially apologised to the Brazilian Ambassador, but he could not prevent the word **BRAZIL** from disappearing from the famous Brazilian café's name. The police who were entrusted with the task of protecting the staff of the café had to retire after a few hours to the relative safety of the chromium

counters, because the plaster began falling from the massive letters of the café's name on the façade.

Tension and fears for the future filled the air. While we were in Cairo lorry-loads of police patrolled the streets. The public excitement rose day by day and reached its climax when the government of Nokrashi Pasha broke off negotiations with Lord Stansgate's delegation and after considering the matter for four months turned to the Security Council on July 8th with the request that the old, long drawn-out conflict with England should be settled according to the rules of the United Nations Organisation. Egypt, which England had declared her protectorate in 1914 and raised to the status of an "independent kingdom" in 1922, only to bind her a few years later, in 1936, by a humiliating military pact, was given the hope of achieving recognition of her right to independence at last. The fourth of February 1942 was still fresh in the people's memory, the day when British tanks broke into the royal palace of Abdin in Cairo and the British Ambassador walked through the ranks of the astounded royal guard right into Farouk's study, to give the king an ultimatum: either to nominate Nahas Pasha Prime Minister, or to abdicate and leave the country at once in a British plane. Threatened by British tanks and cannon Farouk was forced to give in and made Nahas Pasha, the leader of the nationalist Wafd party, head of the government. The whole nation felt the brutal interference of the British as an unheard-of violation of their national sovereignty, and the humiliating gesture towards their king as a personal affront.

It was no wonder therefore that when the machinations of the western powers in the voting managed to get the Egyptian demand cleared off the platform of the United Nations Organisation and once more bound to hopeless two-party negotiations, the people's anger expressed itself in regular demonstrations against Lake Success. The most tragic thing of all, however, remains the fact that the outcome of these demonstrations directed at the imperialist interests of the western powers was always smashed Egyptian shops and dead or wounded both among the Egyptians demonstrating and among the police sent against them.

The final goal

The unrest resulting from international tension is often led astray in the internal life of the country by irresponsible or demagogic individuals who misuse the electrified atmosphere for their own reactionary ends. While we were in Egypt the government issued an order that the workers in a certain factory should stop wearing long *gallabiabs* and put on trousers. In this

factory there was a mounting tale of injuries due to the flowing *gallabiahs* getting caught in the transmission belt. Provoked by irresponsible agitators the workers protested against this order, and the government, instead of explaining to the workers that it was for the protection of their lives and their health, sent the police against them. Dead, wounded, and property destroyed . . .

But in recent years a movement for national liberation has been coming forward, led by class-conscious workers and by a group of progressive students, which has been able to get rid of harmful nationalist elements. This movement condemns the splitting up of forces into narrow nationalistic demonstrations against foreign intervention in the Anglo-Egyptian conflict, because this distracts the public's attention from the main problem: the indivisible struggle for both national and social liberation for the Egyptian people.

Experienced observers are aware of the fact that it was a small group of wealthy Egyptians who out of their own selfish interests helped to force on Egypt the humiliating agreement with England, and finally became a willing instrument of the foreign power. The attempts of the English Foreign Minister, Bevin, to make a secret agreement with Egyptian government circles aroused the suspicions of the progressive movement, provoked a wave of resentment in 1946, and finally brought about the fall of Sidki Pasha's government. During the last few years governments have come and gone in Egypt, but not one of them has undertaken to free the country uncompromisingly from British subjugation. In the elections held not long ago under conditions of martial law the Wafd party gained the majority of seats in Parliament. In their election campaign they demanded the immediate withdrawal of British troops, but when they got to power they limited themselves to official demands that the troops might be recalled, and at the same time proceeded to prepare the way for signing a new agreement with England.

There are few countries where there are such abysmal differences between the social classes as in Egypt. In Egypt the unimaginable misery of the *fellah*, who lives the same primitive life as the serfs of the ancient Kings of Egypt five thousand years ago, illiterate, landless and without the slightest health measures, contrasts with the incredible wealth of the noble *effendi* and the royal family. The private property of King Farouk is placed at twelve and a half million pounds; besides the Abdin palace he owns four other opulent palaces in the capital and many others in all corners of the land. He had one of his summer residences built right at the foot of the Khufu pyramid, to display his regal glory. In Cairo we saw them building a sixteen foot high stone wall round one of Farouk's palaces — it stretched for almost twenty

kilometres. To fence off the royal estate and keep it isolated from the common people senseless wagonloads of valuable building material were used, while the Egyptian *fellah* drags out his miserable life in a mud hut and drinks the water of the Nile.

When talking to several official spokesmen we asked an unexpected question, wanting to know why the government had not allowed the Egyptian delegation to take part in the International Congress of Students. There was a moment of embarrassed silence, followed by the equally embarrassed explanation:

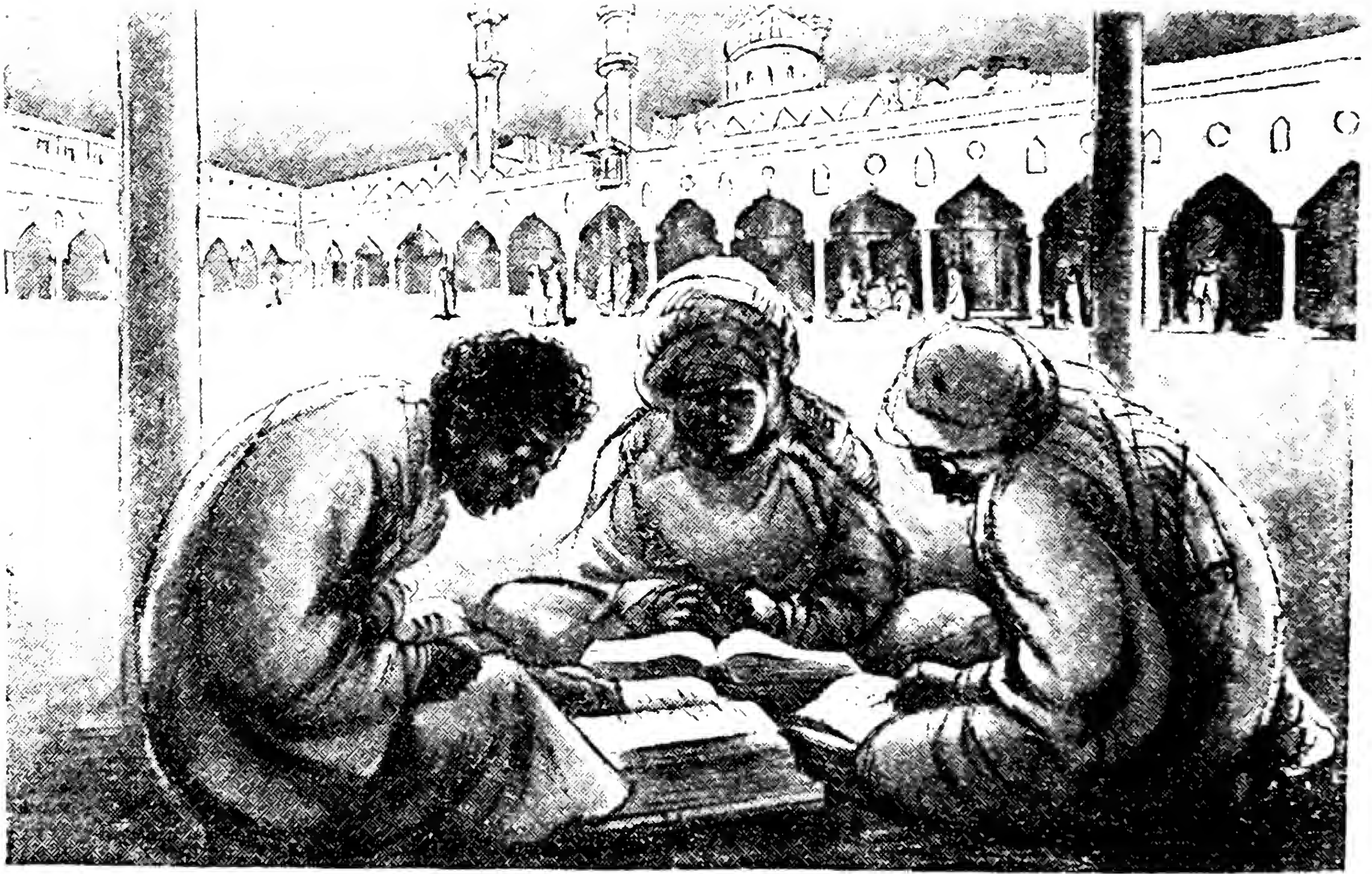
“Our students are enough of a headache to us without any International Congresses. They would bring ideas into our life here of which we have absolutely no need . . .”

Yes, indeed, ideas the Egyptian bourgeoisie would not like to see.

For the progressive workers hand in hand with the politically conscious students of Egypt are demanding that the abysmal differences between the *effendi* and the *fellah* be removed and call for fundamental rights to be given to the broadest masses of the population, still living below the level of human beings. In spite of the strict censorship the report written by the Egyptian Union of Students about the police measures against student demonstrations in the autumn of 1946 was smuggled abroad. Motorised detachments used arms against the students of the Fuad, the Farouk and the Al Azhar universities and used dozens of tanks against the students of the medical faculty in Cairo who also started demonstrating. The Students' Union reported that after the demonstrations more than 170 students of the technical faculty in Cairo were arrested . . .

The Egyptian government rightly considers the demonstrations of workers and progressive students, aimed against the feudal social system, to be far more dangerous than the demagogic protests of the ultra-nationalists against the presence of the English in their country. The government is well aware that when the people of Egypt solve this first problem and give the country a truly democratic government, the second problem will solve itself and Egypt will be a really free country.

Free both from without and from within.



Chapter Ten

BENEATH THE MINARETS OF CAIRO

The hundred towers of Prague have a serious competitor on the continent of Africa.

But they are not renaissance, Gothic or baroque church spires which dominate the largest city in Africa — they are slender minarets. As if carved out of ivory, with filigree work as fine as a spider's web, fragile, pierced, be-jewelled with snow-white indentations, brackets, stalactite-like pillars, cupolas, balconies and crescent moons, they rise above the ocean of mud huts, skyscrapers and half-ruined hovels of Cairo.

The alabaster mosque

On a dusty playground beneath the Citadel, beneath the elegant minarets of the Mohammed Ali mosque, a rabble of boys is playing football. Only one or two of them have proper boots and shorts; the rest play barefoot and wear long *gallabiaks* which get tangled up with their legs at every step. The

shadows of the minarets fall across the spacious courtyard of the largest mosque in Cairo, where the rusty whistle of the referee down below does not penetrate. Over the inner courtyard flutters the green flag of Egypt which not long ago replaced the British Union Jack. The soldiers standing before the mosque smile and then the guardians of the mosque, the alabaster mosque of Mohammed Ali, catch hold of your feet.

Your shoes disappear inside canvas slippers and here you are standing beneath a giant vaulted roof which recalls the Aga Sofia in Constantinople. Rainbow hues fall into the dark space from the coloured mosaic of windows high in the cupola, and throw pastel shades over the richly ornamented walls. The current of the air makes the enormous crystal candelabra tremble and sends its silvery notes ringing far away up in the cupola. Here time stands still. Steps make no sound on the thick rugs and carpets and an isolated visitor does not disturb in the least the quiet of a believer in an alcove of the mosque, turning his face towards Mecca and praising the Prophet in murmured *suras*.

Two other mosques, which are almost stuck on to the panorama of the powerful walls and battlements of the Citadel, look as if they had retreated beneath the minarets of the Mohammed Ali mosque. But although their minarets do not dominate the whole of Cairo, they can well bear comparison with the alabaster mosque. As you walk along the narrow street beneath them you feel as if their charming slender columns of fluted stone must fall on you at any minute. From the dark shadow which has long come to rest in the deep shaft between their walls they rise in several stories as if they would like to support each other to lift the glowing crescent moon at their tip to where it can catch the last gleam of daylight. Here, beneath the vaulted roof of the Sidi er Rifai mosque, King Fuad, predecessor of the present ruler, was laid to his last rest in a royal tomb.

Not far from these two mosques of Sidi er Rifai and Sultan Hasan, tucked away among dirty houses and rubbish dumps, you will find an interesting architectural phenomenon, the Ibn el Tulun mosque. Surrounded by a double wall and tall pillars it gives the impression of an unfinished work. And yet it has stood here unchanged for many long centuries. It is said of its founder, Ibn el Tulun, that he was very hardworking and never wasted his time. At one of the court councils his friends noticed him looking vacantly into space and holding a piece of paper in his hand. The first remark about wasting time had hardly been uttered when Ibn el Tulun got up and handed to the court architect a piece of paper twisted into a spiral.

"Far from it, my friends; I have not been wasting my time. This is what the minaret must look like in the mosque you are going to build . . .!"

Today the muezzin climbs the spiral staircase on the inner side of the minaret just as he did centuries ago when the mosque was built.

As you go out of the mosque you are caught up again in the rush and whirl of suburban Cairo with its dirty, close little shops packed full of oriental goods, wrought metal bracelets, intricate inlaid work, ivory cabinets, Swiss watches, Swedish cookers and American nylons. At the tram stop a lemonade and sweet seller no more than seven years old is sitting on the ground, pulling at a dying cigarette with evident enjoyment; with an elegant gesture he throws away the cigarette end and starts licking up the cellophane wrapping on his cocoanut slices, which have come unstuck during the day. A rattling tramcar goes past, the driver beating a regular, endless rhythm with his bell to warn the heedless pedestrians who jump out of the way in the last fraction of a second. Only from time to time is the singsong voice of the muezzin calling the faithful to prayer heard through the din of the street . . .

Studying with crossed legs

In old Cairo, in the Al Azhar quarter, stands one of the most interesting specimens of Arab architecture, at once mosque and university; its fame spread far beyond the borders of the land of the pyramids many centuries ago. Mohammedans somewhere in Marrakesh on the shores of the Atlantic, or in the fairy-tale land of the Thousand and One Nights, no less than in outlying hamlets beneath the Great Wall of China, all speak the name of Al Azhar with the same respect. All nations of the world who confess the faith of the Prophet send their sons to far away Cairo to bring back the faith and wisdom from the source of the water of life . . .

When the school was founded in the year 970 Al Azhar was at the same time the chief mosque of Cairo. The university preserved its strict theological character right up to the twenties of our century, when the first thoughts of reform of the mediaeval syllabus were voiced. These efforts were encouraged by the Egyptian government's demand that British officials should be removed from the civil service and replaced by Egyptians. The government was able to get a new order accepted by the central council of Al Azhar, widening the curriculum to include philosophy, oratory, law and pedagogics.

But the royal court — and the British governor! — opposed the reforms proposed for Al Azhar, which had the support of the Cabinet and Parliament. The court was afraid of speeding up the growth of a democratic movement such as had considerably limited the powers of the ruler in Mohammedan Iran, and such as had done away with the feudal regime in

Turkey in the twenties of our century, in spite of the presence of foreign armies in the country, and replaced the Sultan — “the sick man of the Bosphorus” — by a republican form of young national capitalism. The British energetically opposed reform because they were well aware that students from India and other Mohammedan lands in the Empire came to Al Azhar. In order to prevent these educated and nationalistic young men from strengthening the movement for national, economic and political freedom in their respective countries, the British gave the Egyptian court their support in the struggle against Parliament and the government. The struggle went so far that in October 1929 the rector, Mohammed Mustapha Maragi, who had tried to make Al Azhar a university which came up to modern standards, was forced to resign. The following year the fate of the university was sealed. Al Azhar was put completely into the power of the King, who deprived the government and Parliament of any voice in the affairs of the university and reserved for himself the right to appoint both rector and professors, and to control their activity.

Today a special permit is required to be able to go over Al Azhar. As soon as you pass through the gates and stand in the spacious courtyard, all the bustle and unrest of the Cairo streets falls away. Marble and alabaster; the supreme achievements of Mohammedan decorative art. Young students from all corners of the Mohammedan world sit in groups and separately on straw mats under the shade of the arcades. They do not flicker an eyelid or even look up when you come to a stop by their side. They are learning. In front of their crossed legs on the straw mat lies a much-thumbed Koran. Bending forward and backward, forward and backward, forward and backward, swaying from the waist up, without a stop, like a perpetuum mobile. This is a well-tried way of concentrating when trying to memorise. *Sura* after *sura*, once, ten times, a hundred times. The lips move silently, the eyes are fixed somewhere in the distance; a quick look into the incomprehensible flow of Arabic characters in front of them and then once more concentration, a concentration which looks like ecstasy. And the endless swaying, ruled by an iron will . . .

In the opposite corner of the courtyard you will see students sitting with a teacher in their midst. He sits with crossed legs and folded hands, just like his students. His text-books are spread over the mats. He is explaining the significance and the fundamentals of the teachings of Mohammed. You pass along the colonnade to the students' living quarters, which are arranged according to the country from which the students come. Here you see tall, well-built Moroccans; Sudanese with snow-white turbans on their heads; students who only a short while before were walking beneath the “golden

minarets" of the Kazemain quarter of Bagdad; a young Abyssinian, a thin, slight lad with ebony face and thick black curls above a high brow; Indians from Pakistan; brown Senussi like those we had met a few weeks before on the shores of Cyrenaica; Egyptians in red *tarbooshes*; a group of students with remarkably broad cheek-bones and Mongol features; Syrians, Armenians, Iranians. A kaleidoscope of nations . . .

You are surprised at the simple, austere furnishing of their quarters. There are just four walls with a straw or a woollen mat which is table, couch, bed, study and prayer mat all in one. You pass into the mosque. Here thick red carpets muffle your steps; you see another group of students at work in the twilight among the marble and alabaster pillars. Others are resting or sleeping.

There are nearly 17,000 students in Al Azhar today, along with about 600 professors and 200 assistant teachers. They have an extensive library with tens of thousands of volumes, many of them rare Arabic manuscripts. As you walk past these students, who give you the impression of absolute passivity and lifelessness, you find it difficult to understand that it is here that today the revolutionary element is growing strong. Rarely is there a demonstration in Cairo at which Al Azhar students are wanting. At any time of the day or night you can see police patrols and military trucks moving round its walls, prepared to take action against the Azhar "disturbers of the peace".

The accumulated energy dozing beneath the surface in Al-Azhar breaks out from time to time in small skirmishes and blows aimed at the wrong victim. Religious fanaticism, the ancient characteristic of Islam, today is changing into dangerous national chauvinism which seeks opportunity to fight wherever possible.

But today there is another movement growing up within Al Azhar, a movement with broad foundations, aimed against those who have taken unto themselves rights in the Arab-speaking countries which cannot belong to them. It is no mere chance that focus of the desire for freedom and independence in western Morocco and in eastern Pakistan is right in the middle, on the borders of Africa and Asia, here beneath the slender minarets of Al Azhar.

Coming back from the other shore

If you want to see the real Cairo, the ancient gateway to the East, the city of the Arabs, you will not find it on the Kasr en-Nil street, nor on the Sharia Soliman Pasha, nor on the modern boulevards with their tall

skyscrapers. Muski, Al Azhar, Shubra and many other quarters, spreading over a large area of Cairo, still live their old, undisturbed oriental life. But they are quarters to which no travel bureau will invite you . . .

There is no intermediary stage between the Arab and the European quarters of Cairo. You just turn off the main street and in a few seconds you are right in the middle of quite a different world. Here are narrow, twisting streets with shadowy houses of stone and clay. On most of the flat roofs there are huts of wood and wattles, and the carved wooden oriels jutting out from the walls of the houses hang high one above the other. The windows are shuttered. The streets get narrower and narrower, as if the clay houses want to lean against each other. You pass beneath a triumphal arch of newly-washed *gallabiabs* and shirts hung across the street in tiers. Here is shade and shadow the whole day long, from morning to night. Only for a few minutes at noon does the sun get right through to the cobble-stones of the street, before the grim shadow covers them again. You realise that the streets do not twist and narrow by mere chance; you get the impression sometimes that in these quarters the builders deliberately chose regularly broken lines in order to throw the sun's rays into confusion and protect the people of these dark corners from the burning heat. The streets themselves are work-places rather than means of communication.

Craftsmen sit with their tools spread under the feet of the passers-by. Through the overcrowded street a tired, skinny donkey threads his way, drawing a cart with wheels six feet high. The oriental bazaars are a riot of every imaginable colour, scent and shape: Egyptian *gallabiabs*, fezzes from Strakonice in Czechoslovakia, Italian sun-glasses, Czech bijouterie from Jablonec, Brazilian coffee, Argentine tinned meat, a collection of "real" scarabs, American safety razors, old weapons from the Sudan, and English cutlery.

Here is the gold-beaters' street in Muski. Kilogrammes of twenty-one carat gold slowly take shape under the hands of Arab artists sitting at their little tables. Thread by thread, pattern by pattern it grows into ornamental soft metal. You hold your breath at the wonderful beauty of these ornaments, a synthesis of skill, talent, patience, tradition and fantasy. Here is an ancient palace which has been turned into an antiquity dealer's workshop and warehouse. In the first room you see wonderful carpets; the art of ancient Persia, Bukhara, Samarkand, Turkestan; here the works of art of Turkish, Indian and Kashmir masters rub shoulders. In the next room works of art from the time of the ancient Egyptian Empire come to life again. Here the treasures of the Pharaohs, the sensational discoveries in the tomb of Tutan-khamen, which amaze the visitors to the Cairo Museum, are revived in gay colours and with the fresh lustre of gold, mother-of-pearl and majolica

— faithful copies of art treasures but yesterday brought to the light of day after sleeping thousands of years.

You go into the workshop, but it is nothing like a workshop in your part of the world! As if the touch of a magic wand had transported you back through the thousands of years which have passed, into the age of the Pharaohs. A white-haired old man sits on a low stool before you, holding in one hand a small bow whose string is twisted round an ebony stick. The sharp ends are fixed in a hollow in a piece of hard wood, one on the ground and one in his free hand. The bow moves to and fro and the ebony stick turns as if on a turner's lathe. The sensitive toes of the left foot hold a chisel, directing its cutting edge, and beneath it the ebony turns into a delicately carved rod.

Nearby an Arab is patiently cutting the mysterious signs of hieroglyphics into mother-of-pearl. Another is concentrating on enchanting inlaid work made up from thousands of tiny splinters of mother-of-pearl. A fourth is creating from a piece of heavy ivory almost ethereal lacery to decorate the royal throne. You leave the workshop convinced that it is the only place in Egypt where the craftsmen of the courts of the Pharaohs are still alive . . .

In a moment the oriental bustle of the little streets catches you into its whirl again. All at once you stand still in amazement: a horse-tram, a real horse tram such as only a handful of Prague people still remember. You would like to get a closer look at it, but all that sticks in your memory is the bony horse, the coachman, and an enormous shouting, rattling, screaming pile of *tarbooshes* and floating *gallabiahs*.

You stop in front of an old second-hand dealer sitting on an army tent flap at the entrance to his immense promiscuous store. As soon as you display the slightest interest he jumps up. From the entrance to his shed a sloping well-trodden floor rises to the ceiling. Here you see an indescribable muddle of gas-masks, sleeping bags, dummy hand-grenades, tent canvas, tropical helmets, aircraft instruments, ropes, spare parts from military vehicles, underwear, overalls, rucksacks, sand-channels, crockery, cutlery, military transmitters, mosquito nets, boots, canvas water bags. It makes your head swim, all thrown higgledy-piggledy in a heap many feet high. Chance buyers climb about on the pile, burrowing into it and digging out what takes their fancy. A few people could reduce this cemetery of war remains to piles of valuable material in a fortnight, but it is much more comfortable to sit down in front of the shop and invite the customers to find new treasures. It is an attractive proposition, after all . . .

As if in a trance you return from this world of mysteries and contrasts, morbid shadow and tempting secrecy, oppressed "ego" and bohemian creative

self-expression, and you come to rest in the shadow of a mosque with the feeling of swimming up from some deep waters of bye-gone ages into the present day. On the steps of an old mosque sits a blind old woman with her hand stretched out for alms, singing. The trembling Arab melody grows from an old woman's broken voice into an exciting throaty trill and flies up and up, past the stone lacery of the minaret and on up towards the dark sky on which her dead gaze is bent . . .

Two streets away the heart of European Cairo beats fast, pouring its green, yellow and red elixir into the neon veins of the well-kept city.

"Bourse Égyptienne, late edition!"

"Four hundred and sixty cholera victims in the last twenty-four hours! Government crisis in France! Serious disturbances in Pales . . .!"

Ministrants in dinner-suits

Islam is the official religion in Egypt. The court, the majority of the higher state officials and the members of the "upper ten thousand" are Mohammedans just as are the *fellahin* in their millions. There is a law allowing freedom of religion in Egypt, but there is also an unwritten law that those who profess other than the Mohammedan faith may not be given important responsible positions.

And yet they are many in Egypt, the most numerous being the Copts. There are nearly three million Copts out of a population of twenty-two million Egyptians; they are *fellahin*, small craftsmen, workers, unimportant officials, shopkeepers and porters. In spite of their education and intelligence, which are above the average, they only occupy inferior jobs in the civil service, for reasons both material and political. Egypt is becoming a leading force in the group of Arab states whose emblems bear the sign of Mohammed; she therefore tries to make the Prophet's position equally strong inside the country.

At first glance you cannot distinguish a Copt from a Mohammedan. They wear the same *tarboosh* on their heads and dress in European clothes like any *effendi*. But they have a far greater sense for equality, scorning social castes and considering woman the equal of man. They do not allow polygamy. While we were in Cairo we had plenty of opportunity to observe the life of the Copt minority at close quarters, and to view it against the background of the more important Mohammedan part of the population.

No occasion could be more eloquent than a Coptic wedding to which we were invited.

Before eight o'clock one evening we came to a dark narrow street. From here a narrow blind alley led off into a courtyard. We stumbled over the stones and avoided a deep puddle only just in time. We went up a narrow stairs with flaking walls, lit by oil lamps on each landing. From above we could hear a confused noise of voices, high trills, and laughter.

We went in. Beyond the spacious, clean hall was a large room where the bride and her bridesmaids were the centre of attention for relatives and friends. There were only women there. Finally we reached the room where the ceremony was to be held and were introduced and greeted with pleasant smiles and hospitality.

The Copts are in the habit of performing their wedding ceremonies at home. At the head of the room is a platform with two gilt chairs, and the Egyptian flag draped behind them. Groups of male relatives and friends sit on chairs round the walls. In a far corner stand the bridegroom and the bride's father, both in European dress with red fezzes on their heads. Between them stands the Coptic priest with a special headdress something between a black turban and a black fez. A large beard spreads over his black cassock with its metal crucifix on the breast. The marriage certificate is being written, informally, in a friendly and merry fashion. Finally the priest puts a cloak of golden velvet on the bridegroom and remains in the room alone.

All at once we hear a noise approaching in the distance, shrill shouts, the well-known high-pitched trill we had heard on the stairs, whistles, several tympani, and male voices singing. In a few seconds the bridegroom steps into the room with his bride, followed by the bridesmaids holding candles, the parents of the young couple, and after them the singers and musicians and the other wedding guests. The unusual ceremony begins. The Old Testament is read in Coptic. The prayers go on, drowned at times by the terrible din made by the young singers and ministrants. What had once been a Gregorian chant had grown acclimatised to its Arabian surroundings in the course of time, with flowing modulations, whistles, tympani, and over and over again those mysterious high-pitched trills. In the end we found out where they were coming from — the young girls were squealing on a high, piercing note which they vibrated by making rapid movements of the tongue between the lips and teeth.

All round there were elemental expressions of joy, laughter and excited gesticulation. The voice of the officiating priest was drowned in the noise most of the time, and yet all those present had their eyes on him. The general mirth contrasted strangely with the grave, stony faces of the newly-married couple, who were looking into the middle of the noisy throng without moving a muscle. The ceremony lasts over half an hour, and then comes

the blessing; at this moment the chief ministrant, a man of about forty, stood on a chair in the middle of the room. He hastily pulled his ecclesiastical vestments over his head and appeared above the rest of the company attired in a faultless dinner-suit with a spotless white collar. His speech of congratulations was interrupted by storms of merriment, and he reminded you more of a radio compère in a cabaret programme than a wedding ceremony speaker. The priest's eyes gleamed, his white teeth shone among his full whiskers, and the next moment he was laughing with the rest fit to burst his sides.

The wedding guests moved into the next room for a little refreshment.

If you're afraid, don't go to Muski

Every European driver ought to be made to drive one kilometre through some of the suburban streets of Cairo before getting a driver's licence issued to him for good.

For this you need not only faultless brakes and a motor-horn as loud as a fire-engine's alarm warning, but infinite patience, iron nerves, and a bit of acrobatic skill as well. In the afternoon and evening the entire life of the houses, balconies, courtyards and hovels moves out on to the road; the pavements are either too narrow or there simply aren't any. The narrow streets are full of grown-ups and children, barrow-men and carts, dogs, goats, sheep, cats, asses and occasionally a herd of cattle or a caravan of camels.

You drive through the "main" street threading your way among every kind of living creature. Slowly you try to pass a tramcar, with its step running the whole length of the vehicle; you can see nothing but the roof, for the whole tramcar has disappeared under the clusters of passengers hanging on. You try to pass the tram with your finger on the horn, but twenty seconds of uninterrupted hooting has not the slightest effect on an Egyptian in a *gallabiah* who jumps off the tram and lands just two yards in front of your bumper. If you manage to stop or get round him he just smiles and throws off an innocent and typical "*mablesb*".

"It doesn't matter, nothing happened . . ."

If you should hurt one of these jumpers in *gallabiabs*, say goodbye to your car. Everything around you with arms and legs will take care to see that it will never drive again. You go on slowly behind the tramcar until you reach the tram stop, because you do not want to tempt fate and repeat your fakir tricks. But at the tram stop you just have to stop and watch the exciting scene for a few minutes: quarrels, shouts, hands waving wildly in

other people's faces, screams. The Arabs are still fighting for a place on the step even when the tram has started off. There can be no question of passing the tram before you reach the main stop at the cross-roads. Here the tramcar draws up by the tram-stop pavement and it is up to you to thread your way past this living wall of bodies before the tram gets ahead of you again.

It is not wise to drive into the side streets. A motor-car, even hooting loudly, is the last thing on earth to attract the attention of anyone in that sea of noise. And so in the end you have to admit that experienced drivers are right and set off on your pilgrimage through the narrow streets on foot. It is quicker and less dangerous . . .

Drivers on the country roads are no more disciplined. You are approaching a crossroads where two mud roads meet. From afar you see a lorry in front of you across the road. For safety's sake you start hooting at least half a minute before you come up to it. The people round the lorry look round at you and go on with what they are doing. You slow down to walking pace, still keeping your finger on the hooter, but that of course does not prevent the driver of the lorry from suddenly stepping on the gas and backing right into your side of the road. At last you realise why the most contented and most sought-after trade in Egypt is that of the chassis-builder!

On the Garden City terrace

There are several hundred Czechoslovaks living in Egypt, most of them in Cairo and Alexandria. They are owners of private businesses, leading figures in industry and commerce, and in many cases have earned a good position for themselves. During the war the Czechoslovak colony in Egypt was the home of our soldiers in the Middle East. The "Lidice" Club, the many Czechoslovak families and the Czech pension Garden City on Kasr el Aini tried throughout the war to give our men what they wanted most after weeks and months spent in the desert: the warmth and quiet of their far-away homes. The war ended, the soldiers returned home, but the friendly links forged during those dark days still endure.

Probably every Czechoslovak who comes to Cairo looks up the pleasant Czech pension on Kasr el Aini. Clerks from the Czechoslovak Embassy a few yards away, the members of trade and industrial delegations, chance visitors, and old Cairo settlers — all meet for a friendly chat in the terrace garden on the pension's flat roof, to think of home while looking at the massive piles of the Pyramids.

Czech is heard in the dining-room, and English and French guests enjoy

the Czech cakes just as much as those who long for a change from Egyptian fare. The owners of the pension, Mr. and Mrs. Hais, have acted as guides to all their countrymen who ever came to the city of the Pyramids. With tireless friendliness and twenty years of experience, equipped with detailed knowledge both of the monuments of ancient Egypt and the Egypt of today, they not only offer you Baedekers, photographs and valuable collections, but are ready to show you everything worth seeing.

"Come along, I'll show you over the Citadel and the dervish monastery of Bektashi," says Mrs. Hais suddenly as we sit over the last course at lunch, and runs off to start her little Skoda car and drive you under the minarets you see every day from the pension terrace. After a few days you are not even surprised to find the Egyptian staff speaking Czech. After all these years they have got used to guests from far-away Czechoslovakia, and so you can just ask the servant in a *tarboosh* for a second helping of apricot dumplings without being afraid he won't understand you.

"Would you like addresses in China as well?" asks Václav Hais, looking through his card-index of all the acquaintances who ever passed through Cairo on their way to settle at the opposite ends of the earth. And you cannot keep pace with him, writing down the addresses of all his friends in Johannesburg, Valparaiso, Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Montreal, Bulawayo, La Paz, or Sidney, together with notes of who is to be given hearty greetings from Cairo and remembrances of a first visit to Khufu's Pyramid or the colossi in Memphis.

When after a few weeks spent here you say goodbye to proceed on your journey, you feel as if you were leaving home. You cannot forget the Hais' "family table" . . .

A roundabout in the water

Imagine buying an air-line ticket to Sofia or to Bombay, and instead of the Czechoslovak air-line bus taking you from Revolution Square to Ruzyně to the airfield, it leaves you somewhere beneath the Vyšehrad cliff, on the tip of the Imperial Meadow, on the Vltava "airfield".

North of the island of Gezira in Cairo the Nile spreads out to enormous width. You feel as if the water wants to swallow up everything around. It is an infinite lake of muddy water, with rows of *feluccas* and *dahabiahs* floating on it. On the other bank a white several-storied boat with the letters BOAC in blue on a silver ground is anchored. In the middle of the Nile buoys are floating. High above your head you hear aircraft engines; the shining wings grow larger, and then the plane turns back in a wide circle;

in a few moments the silver hydroplane sinks to the surface of the Nile in a wide spiral. It circled once more, the giant float appeared a few inches above the water, and a cloud of spray hid the body of the plane. A group of motor-boats with a few fast boats flew over the water carrying passport officials, customs men and people from the Health Service to the giant metal bird which was now gently rocking on the waves. In half an hour these overseas visitors will reach Egyptian soil, after having had their first glimpse of the land of the Pharaohs on the life-giving Nile.

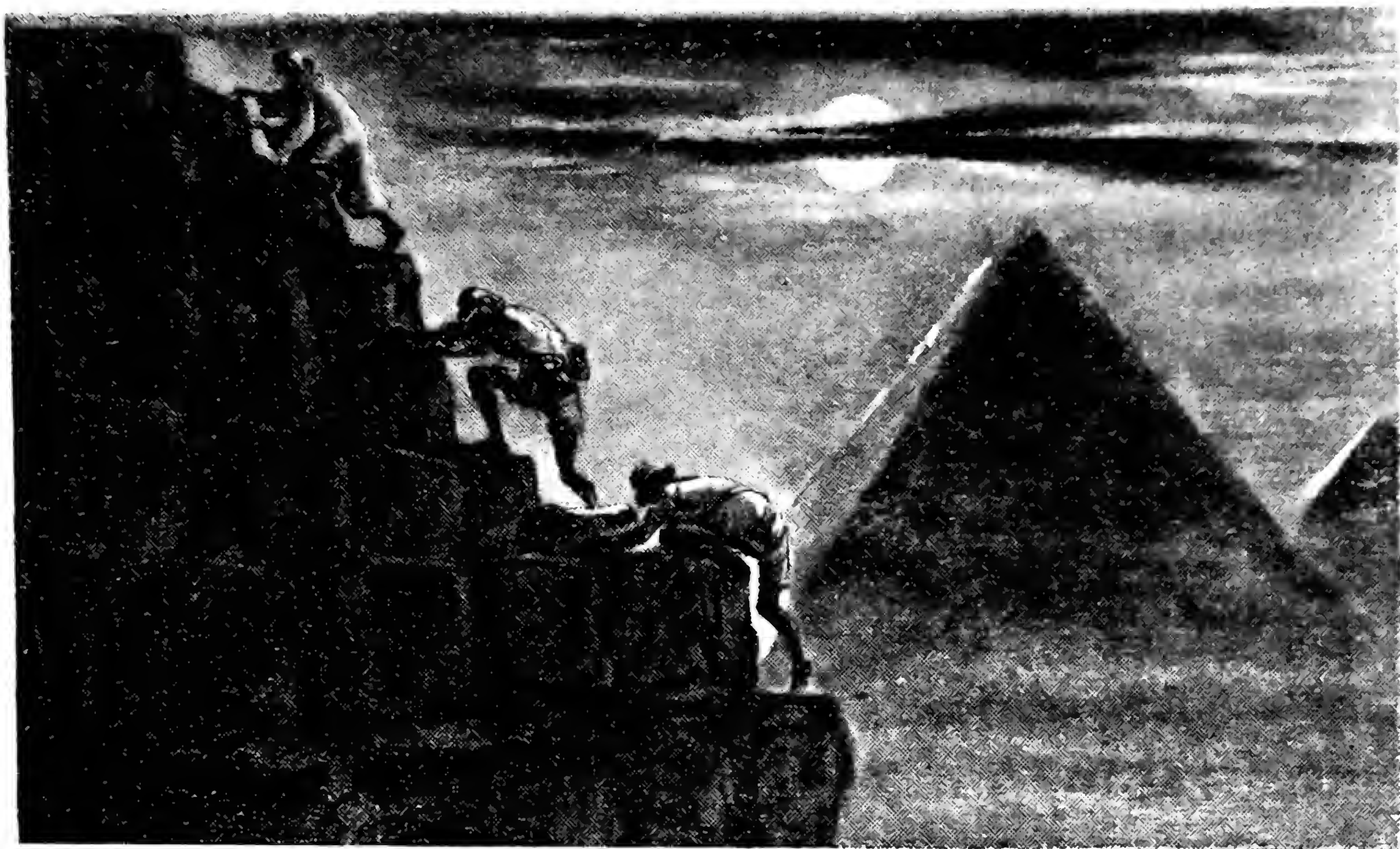
The second point of interest about the Nile are the bridges. All of them, from the smallest to the great modern bridge of Abbas II in Cairo, have one or more moveable sections in the middle.

You drive up to a bridge and it would never occur to you that you might be unable to cross it to the other side. Not until you find yourself a few dozen yards from the bridge do you notice that something is wrong. Shouts, the braying of donkeys, motor-horns hooting — a noise like the Day of Judgment. You get out of the car and go to investigate. Two policeman are drawing a heavy cable decked with little flags across the road. No requests or bargaining or showing of papers is of any avail. Traffic has been brought to a standstill according to the "timetable". You shake your head in puzzlement. What is going on here?

In the centre of the bridge a few Egyptians are sticking the body of a capstan into the asphalt; it has four long horizontal arms, and a second later bare feet go flying round the capstan and eight *gallabiahs* fly out in a circle. The central part of the bridge has broken away from the edges and the whole thing is slowly and majestically turning round. The wide road with its tons of asphalt, the pavements, railings and street lamps. With the permission of the police you slip under the rope with its little flags to the edge of the curve cut out of the road, and look down into the sudden abyss. Twenty feet below you the muddy Nile pours along and on the other side the group of workmen stand round the capstan gazing with indifference at the long row of fat-bellied *feluccas* which have lined up in front of the bridge to sail through to the other side. The white patched sails on the enormously high masts fill with wind and in a short time a procession of majestic triangles sails past. Loads of hay, durra, clay vessels piled in a pyramid, green melons, sugar-cane, piles of casks . . .

This unusual sight interests you for the first or second time, but then when you catch sight of a blocked road in front of any of the Cairo bridges you prefer to turn round and find another which has already closed or is about to open.

The *feluccas*, like the Egyptians themselves, are never in a hurry . . .



Chapter Eleven

SPENDING THE NIGHT ON KHUFU'S PYRAMID

Through gaps in the telephone wires and the forest of wireless aerials of the two-million city, Khufu, Khafre and Menkaure greet the astounded visitor to Cairo, who thought he had come to see the seventh wonder of the world in the middle of the desert. From the flat roofs of the ten-storey buildings beneath which flows the rattling flood of tramcars, luxury motor-cars, carts with two high wheels, and Egyptians in *gallabiahs* and in tropical drill, you can see on the southern edge of Cairo the stone pile of the pyramids which aroused the admiration of visitors in ancient times just as of the New Zealand soldiers whose camps at the foot of the pyramids were broken up only long after the war had ended.

On a warm, wet morning, when the sun's rays slowly struggle through the mists gathered over the Nile, the horizon of Cairo is one heavy leaden cloud. According to all the rules of central Europe you would expect a thunder-storm, but the heat of the sun as it climbs higher soon absorbs the superfluous water in the heavy air and in a few minutes the curtain lifts over the landscape.

On the sandy line of the horizon a yellow sloping triangle suddenly gleams.

After a moment or two the silhouette of another appears, darker and sharper in outline, as if to support the first.

A pyramid is born from the mists of the early morning, and then a second, a third, just as they have been born every morning for thousands of years. In half an hour their outline is clear against the bright sky.

The mysterious enchantment of the tombs of the kings of ancient Egypt has an irresistible attraction. By day trams and buses stream to the pyramids carrying visitors from all ends of the earth; dozens of Arab guides are waiting for them there with bejewelled camels and ponies. They are as competent to produce stereotyped phrases in some dozen world languages as they are to take photographs with the cameras of those visitors who cannot resist being made immortal with their own camera, seated on the back of a camel at the foot of the largest of the pyramids. From time to time the engines of a passenger plane thunder over the heads of this hurrying throng with their Baedekers; the price of an air-ticket bought somewhere at the other end of the world includes flying round the tops of the Khufu and Khafrè pyramids. You can almost count the heads of the curious passengers who crowd to the windows not to miss a second of the humiliated pyramids. These flying fortresses of steel and aluminium circle three times round the pyramids and then come down on the airfield of New Heliopolis nearby, near the ancient Egyptian town of On where the Egyptian high priests once upon a time wrote the royal chronicles.

Climbing the pyramids by night

The weather-worn blocks of the pyramids are wrapped in the light evening mist. The yellow light bathing the Mokattam hills on the other bank of the Nile grows rosy with the reflection of the setting sun. The pointed pencils of the minarets on the Citadel cast their long shadow across the deserted quarries where tens of thousands of workmen and slaves dug millions of tons of limestone and waited for the autumn flooding of the Nile to ferry them across to the other side where they were needed for building.

The visitor who wants to avoid the unpleasant tourist traffic round the pyramids has no alternative but to put off his visit to the night. Such a visit is of course accompanied by a certain degree of risk, because the Arab guides count on such odd visitors and are more of a nuisance than during the day. The dark is their ally, and it may happen that they even use force to get

their money for services they were not asked for. Spoilt by the big money they used to get from British soldiers who spent their leave here, they demand unheard-of fees. For reasons of safety the Egyptian authorities will not allow anyone to climb the pyramids by night, but in Egypt even the strictest prohibitions retreat before the magic word "baksheesh", and the Arab guides include the policeman's bribe in their prices.

The evening of the last day before the full moon we packed our sleeping bags with our film camera, cameras, a few bars of chocolate and some pull-overs, and managed to get into the overcrowded tramcar going towards Giza. Gathering darkness filled the streets of Cairo and garlands of light sprang up along the river bank. The rushing waters of the flooding Nile poured under the Abbas II bridge with a roar, carrying with them thousands of tons of brown mud from Upper Egypt and the Sudan.

In Al Ahram Square a Number Fourteen is waiting to take us almost to the foot of Khufu's pyramid. The moist, heavy air still lies dead in the streets, breathing the accumulated heat of the day. Around this heat a prosperous trade has sprung up — thousands of street sellers and tens of thousands of thirsty Egyptians daily utter the one name . . .

"Kuka Kulaaa, Kuka Kulaaa . . ."

From morning to night you can hear this slogan of the thirsty people of Cairo from the lips of the boys in *gallabiahs* selling in the tramcars. They jump into the running trams with their cases of bottles and ice, run from the one platform to the other, and at the next stop jump into a tram going in the other direction.

You cannot resist and push a bottle of Coca-Cola into your pocket as well, to accompany you to the top of the pyramid.

From the last tram stop a short asphalt road leads to the wide rocky island in the middle of the soft sand which the Egyptian builders thousands of years ago chose as a reliable foundation for their piles of stone of unheard-of dimensions. The smooth facing of the pyramid has long since disappeared, and so the bared blocks make it possible to climb right up to the top over the ledges.

From sunset to sunrise the pyramids in Giza are guarded by the police, but the Arab guides guard them much more thoroughly, for fear of losing the chance of making money. You will come across them at every hour of the day and night. They grab you as soon as you appear at the foot of the pyramid and will not allow you to climb without their "protection". The fact that climbing by night is forbidden is forgotten the moment you start arguing about how much "baksheesh" to pay. It includes the price of imaginary entrance tickets which of course you never see.

We started our climb on the south-west ridge opposite Khafre's pyramid. The moon was already high in the starless vault of the night sky and the giant blocks of limestone seemed even larger in that pale light.

Slowly the sandy base with the bench-like tombstones fell away below us; ridge by ridge the tooth-like outlines of the blocks of stone sank to the dark earth; and far away to the east the silver ribbon of the irrigation canal gleamed in the dark velvet of the night.

The climb is probably only tiring because some of the blocks are nearly three feet high. We had to be very careful and push our sleeping bags with the delicate cameras in them up in front of us, but even so the whole climb did not take us quite eighteen minutes.

Yalla emshi, yalla emshi . . . !

We tried to shorten the time our guide spent with us as much as possible, since we were unsuccessful in sending him down half-way through. He obviously failed to understand our lack of interest in his wellmeant advice, and we on the other hand failed to understand his broken English as he warned us against the secret police. We only understood when he began to explain his ingenious plan of protection in detail.

From the very beginning he took us for German war prisoners who were hiding on Egyptian soil. Our shorts, light khaki shirts, and the sleeping bags under our arms aroused such sympathy in him that he took absolutely no notice of our remarks that we had nothing whatever in common with the Germans.

Some Egyptians sympathised with the Nazis even when Rommel stood by the Nile delta — or perhaps because of that. German propaganda was too attractive; the least it promised was a speedier fulfilment of long-cherished hopes to drive the British out of Egypt and away from Suez.

The prisoners in Cyrenaica and Suez camps knew very well that they could count on this sympathy, and that they could almost certainly count on the help of the people once they got out of reach of the British military authorities.

"I'll come for you tomorrow before sunrise and take you to the sheik's tent into safety," said our guide, pointing between the Sphinx and Khafre's pyramid to where the red glow of a camp fire could be seen in the distance.

"My friends will provide you with identity papers and clothes. You must just tell everybody you are Frenchmen or Greeks, and nothing will happen to you."

We listened with rapt attention.

"In Cairo you can earn twenty-five piastres a day as mechanics or drivers. You needn't worry about food and lodging. And if you want to get married . . ."

"And what about the Egyptian police? Suppose they catch us?" we were anxious to find out more.

"Don't worry, no Egyptian will hurt you. And if anybody starts being a nuisance, tell him to leave you alone. *Yalla emshi*, do you understand? *Yalla emshi, yalla emshi!*"

He nodded with satisfaction when we repeated the words after him several times, and slowly climbed down the pyramid.

"It's not safe here, there are too many Englishmen about. I'll come for you before sunrise," we could still hear his voice although he had disappeared beneath the pale blocks of stone of the pyramid.

We got the impression that our "guide" was rather surprised next morning when we met him at the foot of the pyramid with the very same words he had taught us the previous evening. He tried to get out of us the baksheesh he had already received the evening before, as well as more baksheesh for his brother, who he said had been keeping watch on the other side of the pyramid in case the police saw us climbing up.

Walking through five thousand years

The silvery flood of moonlight bathed the sides of the pyramid and smoothed off the corners of the stone blocks. The endless string of pearl lights hung from the last stop beneath the pyramids far into Cairo, and the trolley-poles of the tiny box-like cars struck clusters of sparks from the overhead wires. The will o' the wisps of occasional street lights disappeared somewhere in the direction of Giza and mingled with the coloured glow of neon lights thrown up against the sky.

Down below in Mena House a few couples were dancing on the flood-lit dance floor to the sound of a Spanish tango with the inevitable castanets. The flood-lights fixed to the tall trunks of palms threw the silver-paper crowns of the palm-trees like fans against the dark sky, just as they did years ago, perhaps, when President Roosevelt sat with Churchill and Chang-Kai-Shek in the cool gardens of Mena House after a day at the conference table.

Far away on the horizon the beam of light on the New Heliopolis aerodrome struck across the night from time to time, cutting the garland of lights along the river bank which cut the Nile valley into two like a perforation

of light. To the south-east beyond the vague outlines of the Sphinx the silver tops and black shadows of the dunes shone through the evening mists. Quite near in the foreground the clusters of lighted windows of the suburb of Giza shone into the night, and the wailing tones of Arab music broke the silence.

Beneath us lay millions of tons of stone raised to the power of almost five thousand years.

The pyramid was a good deal more than two thousand years old when the Greek reporter Herodotus came here and began to measure its dimensions; he wrote a sensational article about the seventh wonder of the world.

He wasn't at all concerned that he could interview only his fellow Greeks; the time had long passed since people had been able to read all those wriggly scrawlings on the walls of the pyramids and temples, and they probably told him pretty much the same nonsense as the dragomans on their camels tell the visitors of today. And yet his story has lived a good two and a half thousand years and been translated into every possible tongue . . .

Up to the time of King Rhampsinôtos (wrote Herodotus) Egypt lived in peace, but Khufu threw the land into great misery. He closed all the temples, forbade the Egyptians to sacrifice to their gods, and forced them to work for him. Some were given the task of stone-breaking in quarries in the desert, and others had to float the blocks of stone across the river on rafts. A hundred thousand people took turns at working on this great construction which took twenty years to build. It took the workers ten years to make the road along which they dragged the stone.

Herodotus went on to say that it was written on the pyramids in ancient Egyptian characters how much money was spent on radishes, onions and garlic for the workers. The interpreter who read this writing to him told him that 1,600 silver talents had been spent on these purchases. Khufu was said to have sunk so low that when he had no longer enough money to finish building the pyramid he threw his own daughter into a brothel and ordered her to make a lot of money. And she is said to have earned the money her father ordered, and because she decided to leave a monument to herself as well, ordered everyone who went in unto her to present her with one stone. From these gifts of stone the middle one of the small pyramids before the east wall of the Great Pyramid is said to have been built. The workers who built this pyramid, as well as the peasants who had to bring her grain were driven to work harder by strokes of the rod and of palm scourges. The slavedrivers were said to have bound the offenders, taken them to the nearest spot on the river and pushed their heads under the water while beating them all the time. Others had their ears and noses cut off as a warning . . .

And then all at once Champollion turned up, two and a half thousand years after Herodotus, and turned the sensational stories of the “father of historians” upside down. All at once the mysterious hieroglyphics on every pillar and wall were made to speak, and the papyrus scrolls which no-one had understood for thousands of years gave up their secrets.

The hieroglyphics, freed from the layers of dust and sand of the ages, spoke up; the mysterious measuring instruments and building tools came to life, and the people who surrounded this immortal work woke up. The rocky foundations around the Giza of today came to life: the architects of ancient Egypt stood their ingenious astronomical instruments on these rocks in order to determine the exact position of the future giant grave of the still-living king by the points of the compass. Around the building site great colonies grew up where soldiers were moved to work off their obligatory service. From far and wide came seasonal workers voluntarily every summer, when the Nile flooded their little fields and they wanted to earn a penny while the floods lasted. From time to time guards would bring a transport of war-prisoners or serious criminals sentenced to the heaviest labour. And into the villages round about privileged craftsmen moved — stone-masons, granite polishers, painters, sculptors, engineers, surveyors, carpenters, those who built machines for raising stone blocks, mechanics and the master-clerks to whom was given the task of cutting the story of the chronicles into the stone tablets, the pillars and columns of the temples.

And the site became a human anthill; hundreds of labourers tore stone from the rocks of Mokattam with wooden wedges and squared the blocks with bronze chisels, while hundreds of others ferried the blocks across the flooding Nile on barges right to the site; thousands of others conveyed the blocks to their working parties who raised them with the help of ingenious pulley machines, arrangements of levers, inclined planes and auxiliary walls higher and higher, from ledge to ledge. Groups of experts polished the smooth granite slabs which were to cover the slopes of the pyramid and other experts worked inside the lower layers of the pyramid making the secret passages and the burial chambers. And in and out among these workers and craftsmen wandered the merchants and sellers of food who had brought their supplies from long distances so that the workers should not go hungry.

So that they should not go hungry and get out of hand . . .

Not until a few years ago was a papyrus deciphered which records a mass protest by the workers against the underhand machinations of Pharaoh's clerks when paying out wages in kind. The workers downed tools and refused to start work again until their wages were paid.

That was probably the first workers' strike in the history of mankind.

20,000 trainloads of stone

Today you find a platform a few yards square at the top of the Khufu pyramid: the summit is thirty feet lower than when the pyramid was finished.

During the last war they even put up a military observation post on the summit, because it forms the highest point for miles around.

The original facing of the Great Pyramid has not been preserved, as it has on the neighbouring Pyramid of Khafre, which is still protected a few yards from the summit by a layer of granite. This original facing makes an overhanging ledge which makes it almost impossible to reach the summit.

Some years ago a famous English mountaineer fell from the pyramid of Khafre; he had several records to his credit won on the most dangerous Alpine giants, but he met his death in the sand at the foot of an artificial hill some four hundred feet high.

In the thirties the Prague doctor Dr. Musil fell from Khufu's Pyramid; his body was later exhumed and burned on a primitive pyre in the desert. It is difficult to imagine the dimensions of the Great Pyramid. All three pyramids in Giza were built with their one wall facing direct east. The side at its base measures 227 metres; even today the height is 137 metres and the sloping sides up which one climbs to the top are 173 metres. The volume reaches the giddy figure of 2,600,000 cubic metres.

Archeologists went to the trouble of expressing these figures in a more comprehensible form. Perhaps the best witness to the superhuman labour of the ancient Egyptians is the fact that today we should need 20,000 thirty-truck trains to transport the material needed to the site. If these trucks were placed end to end they would make a train stretching all along the North African coast from Casablanca to Cairo, or, if you prefer it, the distance from Paris to Stalingrad and back as the crow flies. If the stone used to build this one pyramid were to be used to build a wall all round the frontiers of Czechoslovakia, 2 foot wide, it would reach a height of eight feet.

To move the pyramids we should need more than six times the number of railway trucks we had in the pre-Munich Czechoslovak Republic. It is even more difficult to imagine the army that would be needed, equipped with the most modern cranes, to perform such a giant transport task.

The sun rises over the Nile

Shortly after midnight we changed guard at our unusual camp. On the flat blocks there is nowhere you can hide valuable cameras and film apparatus,

and Arab guides have no difficulty in climbing up several times during the night and waiting for a suitable moment to make something disappear for good.

During those few hours since evening fell the fascinating drama below the pyramids has utterly changed. The garlands of light over Cairo have grown sparser, the horseshoe of electric light bulbs at Mena House and the patches of light from the windows of King Farouk's modern villa beneath the north-east side of the pyramid have gone out. The red glow of the Bedouins' fires has changed to dying points of flame with blue clouds of smoke rising slowly to the sky. The trembling melody of Arab songs has died away and the distant howling of the jackals in the desert has grown silent.

Aeroplane engines could be heard somewhere in the distance. The thundering noise came nearer through the quiet night and the cluster of lights from the windows grew larger, hung round with a red, a white and a green star. A dark shadow sped over the desert and slid from dune to dune until it reached the Great Pyramid. With a jump it rose to pass over the summit and the dark outlines of the metal wings were black against the molten silver of the moon. Slowly the intermittent flicker of the red and white will-o'-the-wisps disappeared in the distance until they mingled with the stars on the horizon. Only the occasional flutter of bats' wings broke the deep calm of the night. Then islands of cloud covered the sky and the moon floated between them like a mother-of-pearl boat in an opal sea. Wavy shadows chased each other over the waves of the desert sand and lost themselves in the green of the gardens on the other side of the pyramid.

The sleeping bags grew warm in the damp night air, and we did not feel cold. Only a stiff wind directed by the giant triangle of the windward wall blew round us whenever we approached that edge. The artificial wall acted like a giant air-pump drawing the hot air up from the abyss.

Before five in the morning the darkness grew sparser. A sapphire blue gleam sprang up over the eastern horizon in a few minutes and rapidly paled. The wax-pale clouds over Mokattam suddenly grew pink and took on the ruddy glow of the burning steppe. Just as five thousand years ago, the giant disk of Rê rose over the Nile, flattened above and below as if it had just come from beneath some giant hammer, and started its victorious journey through the sky.

The golden light spread far and wide over the desert, flowed over the ledges of the neighbouring pyramid and threw long triangular shadows across the regular lines of the *mastabas* dating from the Ancient Empire. Torn wisps of morning mist blew sharply along the east wall of the Great Pyramid and scattered somewhere far away over the desert. The monstrous

head of the stone Sphinx gazed indifferently at the sun it had seen rise so many times before. Far below the strips of the canals began to glitter again and from time to time a caravan of camels crossed their flickering surface and disappeared beneath the green foliage of the trees. The asphalt road running towards Alexandria strictly divided the luxurious green of the Nile valley from the dead yellow of the desert, undulating to the west of this artificial frontier until it was lost in the distance.

A new day was born over Egypt.

Senseless destruction

The tremendous age of the pyramids and the other constructions in their vicinity has left its marks on these monumental works of art. And yet one feels that the thousands of years which lie upon them have not had as destructive an influence by far as has the hand of man.

Here the ancient Egyptian gold-diggers destroyed and robbed just as did the mercenaries of Rome, fanatical Christian monks, demoniac Arabs and then innumerable hunters of antiquaries. When the archeologists first penetrated into the Great Pyramid they found it empty. The Mohammedans had found the entrance many centuries before. The only thing they found here was the name of Khufu, written on the pillars in red.

In the pyramid of Khafrè, opened in 1818 by Belzoni for the first time, search was equally fruitless. He found nothing but an empty sarcophagus and an Arab inscription on the wall of the burial chamber saying that the Sultan of Cairo, Saladin's successor, had been here and found nothing of note. The chamber had been robbed long before.

The third of the pyramids, that of Menkaurè, had met with a similar fate, but a wonderful stone sarcophagus was found there, and a cedar coffin for a mummy bearing the name of the buried king. This, the only treasure found in the pyramid, was put on board ship for England, but the ship was wrecked on the coast of Spain near Cartagena. The sarcophagus, which weighed over three tons, sank to the bottom of the sea beyond recall, but the royal coffin floated on the water for several days before it was saved and sent on to the British Museum.

After the fall of the Fatims in the twelfth century Saladin seized power in Egypt, and ordered the palaces and battlements of Cairo to be built. All the mosques built then and later were built from material brought from the monuments of ancient Egypt. Memphis was almost swept from the face of the earth, for the fanatical Mohammedans carried off to the new city not

only portals, pillars and thrones, but even the walls of the ancient temples.

The same fate overtook the stone Sphinx which stood far in front of Khafre's pyramid. This giant statue represented King Khafre with a lion's body, symbol of his strength and power. The human head of the statue has been mutilated. The greatest damage was caused by the Mamelukes, after their invasion of Egypt; when they were not able to destroy it any other way they shot at the face of the sphinx with cannon. The missing nose gives the sphinx a monstrous appearance. Until not long ago it was covered by drifts of sand and only the giant head seventeen feet high could be seen sticking up out of the desert. The wind constantly blows drift upon drift of sand over it, which has to be cleared away with considerable labour. Today the base is strengthened by stone blocks which were equally damaged. The enormous paws, stretched out towards the rising sun, have also been repaired. The whole statue is 57 metres long, 20 metres high, and a single ear is 1.37 metres long.

Under the "progressive" government of Mohammed Ali in 1820 many monuments from the time of ancient Egypt and triumphal arches from Roman times were pulled down. Most of the material was used to provide lime for the building of the new sugar factories belonging to that Mohammedan dictator.

But the destruction wrought by the Mohammedans had been preceded by another, equally effective. Monks of the first Christian era, who saw in these monumental Egyptian statues the arrogant works of the Devil, systematically destroyed these testaments of history, followed by throngs of fanatical believers. Only the statues made from the hardest kinds of stone survived this mad destruction, those of granite, porphyry or feldspar, and those which had already been buried under drifts of sand.

Egypt old and new

An hour after sunrise we were again at the foot of the Great Pyramid which had provided us with the hospitality of its summit for the night. Below the guides were waiting once more with their decorated camels and grimacing with disappointment over our incomprehensible lack of interest in being carried on the ship of the desert. We passed by the Mena House hotel, deserted now, where the waiters were spreading out white table-cloths for breakfast.

In our thoughts we returned to the group of fellow-countrymen with whom we had spent one of our first evenings in Cairo out here, and the

story of the bright factory owner from somewhere in Moravia. He is said to have sat here one enchanting evening and looked thoughtfully at Khufu's Pyramid over his glass of whisky and soda. All at once he gave a melancholy sigh.

"Chrrrist almighty! That was a - - - - good idea of theirs to put up a pyramid like that right in front of the hotel . . ."

The two-million city at the foot of the Pyramids was waking up to a new day. The white tramcars were running in a double line along the asphalt road. A young woman sat on the opposite bench calmly suckling her baby, and by her side a wrinkled old man twisted the long strip of his turban round his head. Modern motor-cars passed high two-wheeled carts drawn by buffaloes. Egyptian women in black shawls hurried along the narrow field paths with enormous pots on their heads. Suddenly you are among houses: the elegant villas of the Cairo millionaires and film studios; houses several stories high and dark, dirty corners. The hurry and bustle of a big city where people are hastening to work. A man runs across the street with two shining pillars of ice over his shoulder, hurrying before the morning sun turns them to water.

Then you cease to notice your surroundings because the second car of the tram is rocked by a violent quarrel. Gestures of excitement, a deafening chorus of shouts from many throats, and then from everybody's at once. The conductor's sharp whistle brings the tram to a stop amid the growing noise.

After a while the battle spreads to the first car as well, but you still do not know what it is all about. Veins stand out, eyes are bloodshot, voices strained to breaking point. The minutes go by and a second and then a third tramcar draws up behind ours, and the circle of onlookers grows. A policeman with a stony serious face and bearing his rifle in his hand gets out of a tram coming in the opposite direction. For a few seconds he watches this passionate scrum with indifference and then goes round the whole row of stationary tramcars in order to view the situation from the other side. And then without a word he sits down in one of the trams — in one where there is complete quiet.

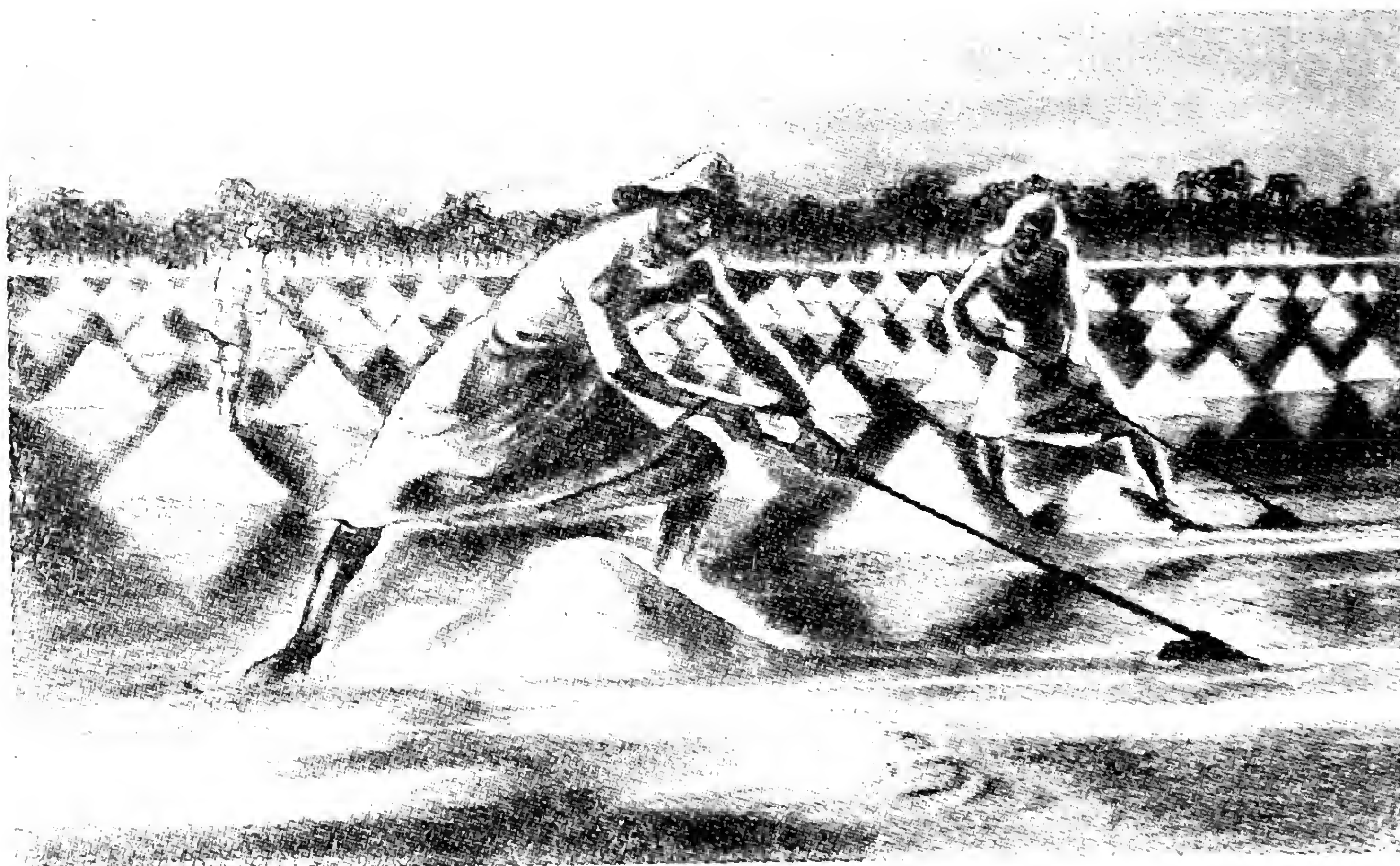
Crowds of inquisitive onlookers press round the centre of the fight. Suddenly a knife flashes. With a jump we get away from this dangerous scene over the railing of the trailer-car. We are just in time to see how the conductor from the first car brings one of the combatants round with a few slaps, after a blow had caused him to lose consciousness . . .

From an Egyptian clerk who had been travelling with us in the tramcar we learned that the row started because of two milliemes, about a farthing. Traffic was held up, rows of tramcars stood frantically ringing their bells,

and hundreds of people were prevented from getting to their workshops and offices.

The red clusters hanging from the acacia trees shook the drops of human anger into the crowd carried away by its passions. The leaves swayed sadly in the morning breeze. Through a slit in the shaft of the street the piles of the pyramids in Giza gazed down at this petty drama . . .





Chapter Twelve

A LAND WITH TWO FACES

It was a sunny Cairo afternoon. The stream of modern cars silently rolled along the asphalt of the Boulevard Soliman Pasha and slowed down carefully to drive round his statue on the round square near Groppi. We were coming out of the Uruguayan Consulate on Sharia Antichana when we suddenly heard an unusual noise. At the same moment the head of a procession appeared round the corner, moving in an orderly fashion towards the main street of Cairo. For the first time we saw a Mohammedan funeral passing down the liveliest street in the European quarter of the largest city in Africa. Along the pavements on both sides of the procession walked lamenting women draped in black shawls. They were hired mourners. A few men headed the procession bearing on their shoulders the coffin draped in lemon-yellow linen.

A funeral procession and spies

By pure chance we had our cameras with us. We walked quickly to get in front of the procession and Mirek focussed as he went. He managed to

get two shots from the front of the procession, and then stepped aside and the draped coffin passed us. He took the third shot. There was no time to look round, nor even to shut the camera case, for a throng of furious Mohammedans suddenly surrounded us, dragged us with them and thrust us against the wall of the house opposite. We could not understand what was going on. Angry looks, curses, arms raised in threat, passionate shouts, spitting. Then the first blows fell. We had no chance to get away, shut in by a complete circle. We retreated. The whole of the funeral procession stood still and everybody's attention was drawn to us.

The dead man was left alone to lie in the street while dozens of hands stretched out, aimed at our faces and the camera.

In the end we were able to retreat as far as a shop and disappear inside. The owner protested strongly, fearing the crowd would demolish his property. He tried in vain to push the furious followers of the funeral procession out of the shop where they had followed us. The row grew louder. We tried in vain to explain in French, English and Arabic. We did not feel too happy, for we remembered the news which filled the Cairo papers a few days after our arrival there. A fanatical mob had attacked two members of the American Embassy in Teheran who had been on leave in Egypt and had tried to take some film shots of the Nile delta. They were saved from lynching just in time.

Finally several *shaueesh* in uniform turned up in the shop, with truncheons in their hands. Our road to the police station was thronged with excited Mohammedans protesting against the police giving us their protection. We felt like criminals. Why? We had only been taking photographs of a funeral procession.

At the police station a young officer received us very courteously. He smiled a welcome and listened to the broken account given by the two policemen and one of the mourners who had accompanied us in the role of public prosecutor. We made it clear energetically that we had been attacked while taking photographs for the newspapers. While we were explaining the officer went on calmly sewing buttons on to his uniform and then said with a smile that we were only being held for our own sakes.

"The Captain will be here in two minutes. You must explain the whole affair to the commander of the station . . ."

Quarter of an hour passed and the buttons on the uniform increased very satisfactorily in number. The lieutenant put on his white coat and looked at himself in the mirror with satisfaction. He was not at all disturbed by our protests and requests to end our imprisonment. In the end the captain turned up.

Once more there were smiles of welcome and warm friendliness, and the report was written at once. Then he had a long telephone talk with somebody who was obviously telling him what to do with us. The captain kept changing the receiver from one hand to the other, and then let out a flood of incomprehensible words followed by a long "aaaahhhh" and the corners of his mouth turned down.

Then he questioned us again. We explained that nowhere in the whole world had the police any objection to journalists taking photographs of funeral processions as much as they liked.

"That's quite possible, but here you are in a different country. You know, our people are very sensitive (he put his hand on his heart) about their religious customs. This just isn't Europe!"

One of the mourners interrupted our conversation in English with a flood of angry impatient Arabic, pointing to the Etareta sticking out of Mirek's pocket.

"Yes," said the captain, turning to us, "I have received orders to confiscate your camera and send it to the control office."

We protested again. The next day we were leaving for the Sudan, and we knew what it was like to deal with the authorities.

"These people think you are spies," said the captain, trying to justify his demand.

"Since when have spies been interested in taking photographs of funeral processions?"

"Then I'll tell you," said the captain, standing and leaning the palms of his hands on the table. "In the last few weeks foreign newspapers have been printing untrue things against us. They are trying to spoil our reputation just when we are fighting for our rights in the United Nations Organisation. You know that cholera is raging in Egypt now; a funeral procession like this could easily be used together with falsified news about victims of the epidemic. I am sorry, but I have orders from my superiors. I guarantee you will get your camera back today."

It would indeed be difficult to find a weaker explanation or excuse. Just at this time all the Egyptian papers were printing items quoting hundreds of victims of cholera, with glaring headlines. These figures were officially supplied by the Egyptian authorities and were quoted by the news agencies of the whole world. But we could only shrug our shoulders over the captain's logic.

"Please give us a statement to the effect that you have confiscated our camera."

There followed the careful, almost ceremonial wrapping up of our Eta-

reta in official paper; a large seal was applied, and from right to left in Arabic characters another explanation of the case was written on the parcel; then together with the reports and a *shaueesh* with upturned moustaches we wended our way to another police station. The *shaueesh* carried the camera, of course. Here we were questioned again, and the situation was repeated. In the evening we were questioned for the third time, this time at the Governor's office itself. The reports made in the morning were carefully studied. Suspicious glances were thrown at us. Our papers went on to yet another clerk, who returned after we had waited a long time and took us to his superior.

On his desk lay our Etareta sealed up. The official examined our passports carefully and then got up and returned the camera, still wrapped up, to our keeping. He broke the seal in front of us and apologised politely for the mistake which had occurred through the ignorance of the police at the first police station. "Forgive us for having detained you for a whole day," he said, conducting us ceremonially right to the door of his study.

We looked round. On his desk lay several other cameras sealed up. What was the fate of their owners? Had they, too, been trying to take photographs of a funeral procession?

The hieroglyphics wake up

A few kilometres beyond Cairo the river Nile is cut by two dams, which hold back millions of cubic feet of water during the autumn floods and during the dry season distribute the sap of life to the whole of the great area of the delta to the north of Cairo. Below the dams the Nile divides into two streams. The entire delta between the Rosetta and the Damietta branch is a mass of greenery threaded by hundreds of kilometres of canals in a spider's web of irrigation channels and narrow clay conduits raised high above the level of the square fields.

The little village of Rosetta lies at the end of the western branch of the Nile. After its pilgrimage of six thousand kilometres from the borders of Kenya, from the shores of Lake Victoria, from the slopes of the mountains of Abyssinia and from the Sudan plains, the muddy waters of the river join the azure blue of the Mediterranean Sea. Here in Rosetta ends the life-giving Nile, to whom millions of *fellahin* give thanks every day just as they did ages ago.

And here, in this very Rosetta, far from Memphis and Thebes, the spark was found which brought the flame of light into the mysterious darkness of the tombs of the kings, the indecipherable papyri and the enigmas of the

hieroglyphics which covered the walls of the temples, the pillars, obelisks and columns of the ancient Egyptian buildings.

In 1799 Napoleon's soldiers found a mysterious stone in Rosetta, inscribed with three different sets of characters. For twenty-three years a number of scholars tried to decipher them, but in vain.

The French scholar Champollion spent many months studying a copy of this stone. He had studied foreign languages for many years, and understood Hebrew, Arabic, Coptic, Syrian and Sanskrit; he had begun to study Persian and Chinese.

The Rosetta stone was inscribed with hieroglyphic characters, demotic characters, and Greek characters; the first two had been undecipherable up till then. From the Greek text scholars learned that the stone recorded a decree issued by King Ptolemy Epiphanes in Egyptian and in Greek. The Egyptian text was written both in hieratic characters, which were used for inscribing in stone religious and historical writings, and in demotic characters, which were much more usual for the Egyptians of that time, since they used them for writing contracts and other matters of daily business. With the help of this inscription, and in particular by comparing it with other hieroglyphic writings he had studied, young Champollion managed to decipher individual hieroglyphics step by step and to establish a system for these characters. Coptic, the language of the Egyptian translations of the Bible, written in Greek characters, helped Champollion to decipher the language of the ancient Egyptian inscriptions as well.

In 1822 the mysterious inscriptions on the walls of the temples and on the papyri began to yield their thousand-year-old secrets. Few of those who visit the monuments of Egypt today are aware that only a hundred and thirty years ago the most famous scholars in the world walked round these inscriptions without understanding them. Champollion was unable to finish his great work. He died young, but he had fulfilled his historic mission. Thanks to him the libraries of the world were enriched with thousands of volumes revealing the incredibly dramatic story of the Nile valley thousands of years ago.

Today Rosetta is a small insignificant port. Fishermen throw their nets into the sea every day from its shallow shores. Along the whole long bank of the Nile right to its mouth workmen mix grey bricks from Nile mud and dry grass and bake them in great cylindrical kilns. On the way from Rosetta to Alexandria you drive round the salt lake of Edku. In the bright sunlight piles of white crystal gleam in front of you, recalling snow thrown up in drifts. The reddish waters of the shallow lake with the shining white piles of damp salt sticking up out of it explain themselves. Barefoot workmen

in this salty marsh rake the crystallised salt into heaps with metal hoes, and the white cones are reflected in the stagnant water like spindles of cotton thread. Heaps of this white gold are arranged along the roadside six feet high, like heaps of gravel in our country. From time to time a caravan of camels or asses with jute bags hanging on their flanks will pass this way, and the piles disappear. The dirt and dust of the road do not seem to matter.

Here in the country, where the Cairo newspapers do not penetrate and pan-Arabic chauvinism has much less effect, you find people quite different from those of the cities. There the daily papers pour out a flood of propaganda not only against the British, but against all who do not confess the faith of the Prophet.

Here a fisherman will calmly pose for your camera and grant your request that he should not look straight into it. The *fellah* at his creaking *sakia* greets you with a smile and prods his cow so that you can get a good photograph. The workers with their excavator at work on a new canal between the durra fields invite you to a cup of coffee in the cabin below the excavator and vie with each other in expressions of friendly helpfulness, even if they cannot understand you properly. They resolutely refuse a tip. Not for all the world would they mention the word *baksheesh*, because you are their guests, guests from far-away Czechoslovakia; they have only a vague idea of that country, but they have heard pleasant things about it.

Workmen on the salt-marshes, on the roads, potters, ropemakers, and oarsmen, all will run up to surround you when you stop near them, and welcome you with a flash of white teeth, in a friendly, sincere fashion.

Here in the country you do not feel that unpleasant sensation of uncertainty which follows you everywhere in the Arab quarters of the towns. There you are followed by the suspicious, unfriendly gaze of people who have learned to look on every European as an enemy, wherever he comes from. They do not understand that there are differences. Every day the newspapers print excerpts from the speeches of their leading statesmen trying to win Egypt's rights in the international forum. They feel that it is the western powers who are opposing them.

You can talk to people who will tell you openly they do not like the Americans because they interfere in the affairs of Palestine and the whole of Africa. And Palestine with the whole of North Africa — that is an Arab affair! They do not like the French, because they have already felt the weight of French occupation, during the Napoleonic wars, and they know how little enviable is the life of their fellow-Mohammedans in the French colonies. You understand all at once why the simple people lump together all those who do not wear a *tarboosh*. They suffer from an inferiority complex incul-

cated in them by most of the papers of the governing political parties. Then you are not surprised to meet with so many looks of hatred, and in the end you begin to feel them even behind your back.

Knights in armour on the asphalt

One of the remarkable sights of the Cairo streets are the policemen. A point-duty man in Cairo has a most comfortable job: he usually stands in the middle of the side street where it enters the main street and takes his ease by a six foot rotating pole which has four arms fixed at the top in the shape of a cross. Two of the arms opposite each other are painted green and the other two red. From time to time the policeman turns the pole quarter of the way round, and there his job ends.

The Cairo police are a varied and strange crowd; they all wear white uniforms with black belts and gold buttons. Some wear white tropical helmets and prop up the traffic signs. Others wear steel helmets and sit in front of government offices and the bigger shops on something between a cannon and a flintlock. And then there are policemen with ordinary helmets, long sticks and shields. All of them are *shaueesh*, but in addition these descendants of the mediaeval armour-bearers from the tilting-ground have also been given the mysterious name of *buluk el-gafar*. And then there are also in Cairo *shaueesh* who carry short wooden truncheons and hand-shields. All of them are terribly solemn, stern and self-important. If you try to get a closer view of their truncheons they ask for your passport and name and address. Their arms are probably an official secret.

When Cairo is peaceful you meet a policeman every few steps. When things start moving the arm of the law mysteriously disappears from sight, to swarm out again as soon as everything is quiet again.

The second and no less remarkable feature of Cairo life are the Egyptian dragomans. Their main occupation is lightening the pockets of foreigners. Occasionally, but very, very rarely, they will also perform some service for a fat baksheesh. There are professional dragomans and amateurs. The first are to be found round all Egyptian antiquities and sights worthy of note. The amateurs you will meet — or rather they will meet you — everywhere, at every step, in every corner.

If your car draws up by the pavement one of them is there to open the door for you. The foreigner will pay a piastre. The dragoman never goes to a car with an Egyptian number plate.

As soon as you leave the car to walk anywhere, you must hand it over to

the care of an "officially" licenced parking attendant. Usually they are not to be distinguished from the other dragomans. They are not there on the street to watch the cars, of course. If you do not lock your car you can say goodbye to its contents. The attendant fulfils his duties by holding the door open for you when you return, and bowing. For this he gets a piastre. Of course he asks for ten piastres from a foreigner. If he gets it he asks for baksheesh as well. If he gets nothing but the official fee of half a piastre, he says thank you and disappears, because he can see that his victim already knows his way about in Egypt.

The dragomans are most energetic at the railway stations. The licensed porter seizes your suitcase. He carries it for you, asks for five times the official fee, and starts passionately persuading you that it is his right. You give him what he has a right to ask, according to the price-lists stuck on every pillar, and you add the same amount as baksheesh.

Up comes another. He helped the first one to lift the suitcase. Baksheesh.

Up comes a third. The first one put the case down wrongly, something might happen to it. A piastre.

Up comes a fourth. He watched the two of them to see they didn't take the suitcase off the first one. Baksheesh, mister!

The magic curse is just two words: *Yalla, emshi!* The fourth disappears along with all the others who have been given what is their due and what is not, and along with all those who were still lying in wait for you. First of all because you have told them in plain words to leave you alone, and secondly because they have got the impression that you speak Arabic perfectly and know your way about. The Egyptian police are very strict about punishing unscrupulous dragomans, in order to protect foreigners from unpleasantness and to preserve at least the semblance of a good reputation.

On a sweltering day you stop for a glass of cool lemonade in a good-class restaurant. You pay at the table with a bank-note. The waiter takes it away to change it, even if his pockets are bursting with change. You wait five minutes, drink up your glass, and wait another ten minutes. There's not a sign of the waiter. He is standing behind a pillar somewhere watching your slightest movement. He hopes that in your interesting conversation you will forget or else just reconcile yourself to the loss of the remainder so as not to have to wait. Your Cairo friend, an old settler, simply smiles. He claps his hands, the head waiter appears, and five seconds afterwards there is the waiter bowing and giving you your change with a courteous smile. If you let the word "police" drop the head waiter will give the waiter what for in front of you, for it suffices to report such an occurrence to the police and the owner of the restaurant has a fine to pay.

This of course visitors fresh from Europe do not know — and the Egyptian waiters can read it in their eyes!

You come to the pyramids. A crowd of dragomans rush at you like vultures at a corpse. One wants to act as guide, the second wants to give you a ride on his camel, the third on his horse, the fourth wants to photograph you with your own camera, the fifth wants to sell you postcards, the sixth wants to read your palm. Yet another will offer you "real" scarabs which he "found inside Khufu's pyramid". Another shakes a cluster of keys and pulls at your sleeve — he wants to open the underground burial places for you. He will not disappear until you tell him there are no doors there anyway.

The dragomans' repertoire is very limited, but he can manage it in ten world languages. He will explain that the pile of stone in front of you is a pyramid, that it was built by Pharaoh Khufu, that it was terribly long ago and that there is a dreadful lot of stone in it.

Then the dragoman will ask what nationality you are and always assures you that the Egyptians are your blood-brothers. He will also ask you whether you like it in Egypt, and will offer to read your palm. If in the end you try to find out what he charges for acting as guide, he has complete confidence in the benevolence and generosity of the noble foreigner. Whatever you pay him he wants double. If you wait for him to fix his own figure he will ask for half a sovereign. If you give him five piastres he will ask for baksheesh and go away.

Wood and water in the rocks

The sight of Egypt today is very confusing for the observer, if not completely bewildering. There are few lands where there are so many contrasts side by side, so many two-faced phenomena. Here the long tradition of thousands of years links hands from the deciphered hieroglyphics to the station for listening-in to telephone calls, equipped with the most modern apparatus. A mile or two from the stone witnesses of the ancient Egyptian Empire stand steel constructions and the wide windows of assembly shops and modern engineering works. Side by side with biblical two-wheeled carts you see aerodynamic motorcars equipped with the most luxurious comfort.

These contrasts in technical progress are but a reflection of the more serious anachronisms with which the whole of Egyptian life has to struggle. When you are in the European quarter of Cairo you feel as if you were somewhere in western or central Europe. But only for a moment, as long as you watch the long stream of American cars rolling past the fifteen storey buildings with their palatial marble entrances.

A glance at the pavement brings you back to the hard facts of Egyptian life. And a few streets further on you are not only in a different continent, but a different century as well. There are days and hours when you feel as if you had gone back to the days of Louis XIV. The crudest form of feudalism keeps alive the past ages of Europe in this most northerly tip of the land which knew this form of society when the people of Europe were still dressed in skins or in nothing at all.

The glitter and magnificence of the royal court form too sharp a contrast with the unimaginable misery of millions of *fellahin*. In this respect the Egypt of today does not differ fundamentally from the Egypt of the Pharaohs.

But new elements are demanding to be heard in the country today. A new social class is being formed, formerly unknown, which is gaining control of Egypt's growing trade and industry. Primarily this class ostentatiously proclaims the exaggerated nationalism and pan-Arabic chauvinism which saturates public life in Egypt today. Only thanks to this mask of "patriotism" has the class of industrial and trade magnates been able to take its place at the head of the movement to rid the country of foreign imperialist intervention.

Economic and political considerations force the government to encourage the growth of this class. They try to secure for Egyptian management the new industries which grew up out of the war boom.

The present-day rulers of Egypt apply the policy of Louis' ministers to an ever increasing degree. They too worship gold, led by the same motives, even if they themselves do not realise it. They are trying to get as much gold as possible into the country by exporting at all costs — only the results are somewhat different. The technical demands of the twentieth century increase the capacity of Louis' manufactories and at the same time call for a much larger number of trained and responsible employees. Their experience and their demands present the ruling class of Egypt with a whole series of problems which were unknown to the old mercantilists.

As far as technical progress is concerned, Egypt is becoming a new country. Factories and workshops are being built, roads laid, trade and industrial premises built in palatial style; the old dams are being brought up to date and new ones planned, and luxurious residential suburbs are springing up on the edges of the cities.

The Egyptian people in the towns are slowly becoming aware that the results of this technical progress flow into the hands of that same small class of Egyptians who have fattened from time immemorial on the slave labour of millions of ignorant *fellahin*. They are becoming aware that in trade and business the social structure of Egypt is as like as two peas to that of its traditional agriculture, the backbone of the country's economy. They have

gained formal independence of the British Empire, but their social conditions have remained unchanged.

In agriculture they were concerned merely to keep up tradition. Almost the whole of the land has belonged since time immemorial to the Egyptian aristocracy, to a few elect. For thousands of years millions of *fellahin* worked as slaves, and later as serfs, a state of affairs which has changed little today.

This paralysed development is also helped by the technical backwardness of Egyptian agriculture. The whole time we were in Egypt we did not see a single tractor. Even an ordinary iron plough is a rarity. In spite of the tremendous development in types of agricultural machinery all over the world the *fellahin* throughout Egypt know only their traditional primitive implements: a wooden share instead of a plough, Archimedes' screw, *shadoofs* and *sakias* instead of pumping stations, tallow lamps instead of electric light, water buffaloes instead of Diesel engines. Along with primitive implements and backward methods is handed down their whole way of life. And the Koran hand in hand with the Egyptian government holds the *fellahin* deliberately in ignorance.

But the newly-born industries are something else, something new for Egypt. They mean revolution in the technical development of the country.

Not only does the demand grow for trained engineers and technical staff; the ranks of the factory workers must inevitably swell too, and the narrow outlook of the *fellahin* is not sufficient for the factory worker. Even so they still drag with them their artificially maintained illiteracy, their fossilised traditions and their Mohammedan fanaticism.

But even these chains are no longer taken for granted. The incredible anachronisms of their life strike them at work as well, and the shock does something to disturb the wall of prejudice and passive inertia. Trade Unions are being formed. A new generation of young technicians is growing up, unburdened by long years of study of the Koran in Al Azhar. Together with technical progress and the growth of industry a new social force is growing up in Egypt, a force which is the bearer of social progress and the harbinger of stormy changes in the out-dated economic structure of the country.

Progress is seeking cracks, slowly but surely, through which it can penetrate the compact battlements of tradition and prejudice in Egyptian life. It reminds you of the stone-breakers in the limestone cliff of Mokattam, when the pyramids were being built. A tiny crack was enough; they thrust a dry, apparently harmless little stick into it — and then poured water over it. The stick swelled and irresistibly wrenched enormous blocks of stone from the bowels of the hills.

Water and wood in the rocks.

An equally effective wedge stuck into the mountain of prejudice and tradition is the technical progress which is irresistibly penetrating the land of the pyramids.

Africa to the left, Asia to the right

Just imagine driving from Hradec Králové to Prague along a road marked all the way: *Spain*.

In Egypt you can find such a oddity. You are driving out of Cairo and making for the second greatest port of Egypt, Port Said. The shortest, and indeed the only road, even if it is not direct, leads through Ismailia along the banks of the Suez Canal.

Beyond Cairo you see on the signpost the word *Palestine*. You don't want to believe it, but in the end you calm down, since these signposts lead you reliably along the Ismailia Canal towards the continent of Asia. You drive alongside an endless strip of water crowded with the characteristic three-cornered sails of the Egyptian *feluccas*, slowly moving along behind each other. Then a bridge gets in your way for an hour; its railway sleepers serve simultaneously as a road. According to the timetable it is now the turn of the *feluccas*, *dahabiahs*, boats, dredgers and dinghies, and there is nothing for you to do but wait for an hour, because there is no other bridge for dozens of kilometres. Then the bridge turns its ninety degrees back again, the railway line stretches out straight ahead and the road to Asia is open. Not until an hour later does another obstacle stand in your way. It is water again, but it has nothing to do with the Nile. It is an intruder here, but it has pushed its rival far into the background.

In 1869 Ferdinand Lesseps opened the sluices of his great construction, which revived the old idea of Nékó and Darius. Somewhere in the middle of this broad artificial channel, broken by the waters of the lake at Ismailia, the waters of the Mediterranean Sea met those of the Indian Ocean. A revolution took place in the tradition of centuries of seafaring; the continent of Asia was once more divided from that of Africa, new ports sprang up and others died. The shares of the Suez Canal Company shot up and the Great Powers turned their attention to this strip of silver water which looks like a worthless bit of string on maps of the Near East.

And then the salt water of the Suez Canal mingled with human blood.

At Ismailia two great granite columns stick up far above the desert which here nibbles at the canal banks. They recall the memory of those who fell here during the first world war. At the other end of the Canal you will find a memorial to the Indian soldiers who fell here too, fighting for something

they did not understand and which was as foreign to them as the South Pole. Not much was wanting and human blood would have flowed here a few years ago, too, when Rommel stood at El Alamein preparing for the final blow at the main artery of the British Empire. Endless rows of white military tents, the barrels of guns, and the barbed wire stretched along the Suez Canal even today bear witness to the fact that the British are not prepared to give up in too much of a hurry this last strip of land which is all that is left to them of their former base in Egypt.

We tried for a while to forget all about the statistics of shipping tonnage floating through here daily from all continents of the world to the ports of Europe. The smooth asphalt of the road runs parallel to the canal bank behind the high reeds. At every tenth kilometre the masts of the signalling posts appeared in front of us, and then a few palm groves took the place of the narrow strip of green on the left. On the opposite bank of the canal the midday heat blew out of the desert, and the far-away lines of the mountains of Sinai trembled in the heat. There Asia began. Two vast continents, divided from each other by a strip of salty water . . .

Before you reach Port Said the sand suddenly gives way to the water and shrinks to three mere strips, dividing the watery element. There are salt marshes on the Asian side, a strip of desert, the salt water of the Suez Canal, a narrow strip of land with the road running along it, the raised level of the fresh-water canal, a third strip of land, and then the endless stretches of the salt marshes which mingle with the Mediterranean Sea somewhere in the distance.

This is the hinterland of the second greatest port in Egypt, Port Said. Its landing quays and hungry cranes are still far ahead when the monstrous shape of an ocean-going liner rises from the waters of the canal. It looks as if it was cutting its way through the desert. It comes nearer, and its funnel, leaning towards the right side of the deck, is seen more and more clearly. Then at the back the propellers and folded wings of aircraft come into view, the long rows of round cabin windows pass along within reach of our hands, the inquisitive faces of sailors in white uniforms, the landing deck, and the flag of a British warship.

An aircraft carrier set down in the desert.



Chapter Thirteen

THE *SAKIAS* ARE SILENT

In Egypt we ended our wandering pilgrimage along the North African coast without our Tatra. Our clothes and luggage lost the smell of tar, oil and petrol, sheep and goats, all our companions for two and a half thousand kilometres on the back of lorries.

After many days spent in wandering through the labyrinth of Egyptian government offices and bureaucratic regulations the port of Alexandria finally opened its gates to us. In a distant corner of one of the warehouses, underneath piles of crates and sacks, rested three dusty crates each with a Tatra 87.

“Carry on with one of the three Eights lying in Alexandria docks!” Those were the orders of the Prague management of the firm of Tatra. But it took half a day to get the first of the crates out into the open; we would have had to spend at least another day to get the other two out.

In this first crate was one of a series of mass-produced cars, the choice of which was not influenced either by the firm or by us. Mere chance — and the manager of the Alexandria warehouse — determined which car was to

undertake, alone and unaccompanied, the first to do it, the journey across the continent of Africa from the shores of the Mediterranean Sea to the Cape of Good Hope, and then go on over the roads and lack of roads of Latin America.

A week later the original black paint of the new Eight was hidden under a coat of silver and on new masts by the headlights appeared the Czechoslovak flag and the flag of the Auto Club of Czechoslovakia. Because until customs formalities were completed we had to travel with the carnet given us by the Royal Automobile Club of Egypt on the guarantee of the Czechoslovakian Auto Club, for the time we were in Egypt we had to drive with an Egyptian number plate. On the back bumper of our Tatra by the plate ČS appeared an oval black plate with the letters ET.

This completed our preparations and we were ready to set off. The car would have to be run in on the most difficult sector of the terrain — in the Nubian desert.

Direction: Cape of Good Hope

In addition to the inevitable thermos flasks of ice-cold water which you find in almost every hotel and pension in Cairo, in Asyut you also find mosquito nets above every hotel bed. They remind you of the baldequins over beds at the time of the French Revolution, but you appreciate their protective effect only when you go calmly to sleep while dozens of mosquitoes and other flies buzz round your head. The flies follow you round all day, and you cannot get rid of them. Asyut is less than four hundred kilometres from the Egyptian capital, and yet you feel at once that you are in a different world. This is where a different Africa begins.

We started our journey to the south on a sunny morning in October. We had to put our start off a number of days, because the Sudanese authorities were not content with two certificates that we had been inoculated against cholera in Prague and threatened to put us in quarantine for a long period on the Sudan frontier if we did not undergo a further inoculation in Cairo and allow the proper interval to expire for control purposes.

The pyramids in Giza and the minarets beneath Mokattam closed our view of North Africa, and the mud road, over which rose a cloud of dust, pointed down south. Degree by degree, parallel by parallel. Beyond this imaginary network, far beyond the Equator, lies the final goal of our African journey, the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Town with its Table Mountain.

Today we left Cairo behind . . .

Besides a few asphalt roads Egypt boasts a thick network of mud roads

which are very well kept. The almost uninterrupted rows of mud villages and the isolated *fellahin* huts are joined by a narrow twisting strip of well-trodden mud. The surface of the road yields nothing to an asphalt surface. It would permit of high average speed even in spite of the tricky bends. But the mud roads of Egypt conceal other dangers. Every little while you pass a group of half-naked roadtenders who spend the whole day dragging cask after cask of water from the canal alongside the road, and pouring it over the surface.

With the help of this attention the dry foundation does not lose its firmness and on the moist surface the slightest unevenness is smoothed out. Only the fine mud mixed with the muddy Nile water turns the surface of the road into a slide. Not a few cars have ended in some Egyptian canal or irrigation channel. After all, pouring water over the roads and filling in any little holes with mud from the Nile is the cheapest and most effective way of maintaining roads in good repair in a land where it would be tremendously difficult and tremendously expensive to build a firm foundation for roads in the soft mud.

And after all, the mud roads costs next to nothing. Water and mud from the Nile cost nothing and the work of the *fellahin* today just as thousands of years ago costs practically nothing either . . .

The burial ground of the bulls robbed

On the edge of the western desert along the left bank of the Nile stretches a narrow band of ancient burial grounds and pyramids. The famous pyramids of Giza, which have become the symbol of Egypt in the eyes of the world, form but the beginning of a whole series of others.

Zawiyet el Aryan, Abusir, Sakkara, Dahshur, El Maharraka, Meidum, Havara. These are names which have tempted hundreds of thousands of visitors during the thousands of years past, although today they linger in the shadow of the greater fame of Khufu, Khafre and Menkaure.

The most interesting of these is Sakkara, the necropolis of the first capital city of Lower and Upper Egypt, Memphis. The extensive burial grounds stretch for more than seven kilometres along the edge of the desert. Egyptologists from all over the world are constantly discovering new treasures in this city of the dead.

High above the desert the famous step pyramid rises, built over the tomb of King Djoser. It is older than the pyramids in Giza. Entrance to the tomb is partly blocked by the ruins of the outer layers of the pyramid. To the

northwest of the step pyramid is Serapeum, the burial ground of the bulls dedicated to the Sun God.

Asses take you through the deep sand from the pyramid to Serapeum. You are given an oil lamp and enter a long dark passage. To the right and left alternately, spacious rooms have been cut out of the rock and in the centre of each is a massive granite sarcophagus over five metres long and three and half metres high, a solid block of stone. Nomads from the desert had robbed these sarcophagi long before the modern egyptologists discovered them. One can only admire the art of the robbers.

Not only did they discover exactly where the sarcophagi lay deep below the ground but they worked down from the surface of the ground exactly to where they lay and opened the extraordinarily heavy lids without damaging the sarcophagi. Then they brought all the treasures up to the light of day and removed all traces of their deed.

Only one sarcophagus remained untouched. It seems probable that the thieves were disturbed and did not want to risk such a daring undertaking for the sake of a single coffin. Centuries later, egyptologists opened this one sarcophagus which had escaped the robbers — and it is also the only one which was damaged by being opened. Scholars with all the advantages of modern technique proved unable to lift the heavy lid and had to break open one of the sides in order to reach what was inside. It is equally amazing to think that these monstrous heavy colossi were taken deep below the ground without being in the least damaged. Modern scholars tried to take one of the smaller sarcophagi up to the surface; they only managed to move it a few yards into the passage and there it stands to this day, bearing the marks of clumsy handling.

After looking over Mariette's house you enter the tomb of Tsuye, a high dignitary of one of the kings of the fifth dynasty. In the underground granite tomb, entered by a narrow passage, you find beautiful reliefs and bas-reliefs, pictures and hieroglyphic inscriptions. You cannot get rid of the impression that the ancient Egyptian artist had laid down his instruments only yesterday to hand over to his master the finished work.

A temple still stands above the tomb and has now been restored. Most of the mural paintings have kept their original colour, bright, clear, speaking a tongue as comprehensible to the visitors of today as it was to its antique admirers.

Pictures pass before your eyes as if in a dream. Zoser's Pyramid, surrounded by the ruins of temples, a great colonnade of pillars built into the walls, narrow little passages and stone tombs in the Wenis Pyramid with their walls covered with hieroglyphics. The underground tombs of Persian kings reached

by a spiral staircase with a hundred and thirty-three steps; the prince's tomb, where the light of a lamp brings out a riot of fresh, pleasing colour. So many amazing works of art, such perfection of form and such a tremendous age lying over it all.

The curtain of the necropolis of the "Kingdom of Upper and Lower Egypt" falls behind you and you approach the place where the legendary Egyptian king Menes built his town Menopher, later known as Memphis; it was a town of mud and unbaked bricks which only later grew into the seat of the ancient Egyptian kingdom.

Sadly little is left of what was the famous Memphis. In the middle of a palm grove shines the surface of the "lake". That is what the tourist hand-books call it, but it is a muddy puddle with a green decaying surface lying amongst the ruins of what was once the majesty of a kingdom. Enormous blocks of stone, the ruins of the temple of the Sun God and a few damaged torsas of colossi stick up above the surface of the water in disorderly array.

And on the bank a group of *fellahin* are threshing millet with the dry ribs of palm leaves; with wooden shovels and baskets they throw it against the wind to get rid of the chaff just as they did centuries ago . . .

Old Memphis lies beneath fields of cotton and sugar-cane, trodden down and forgotten. Only stone has survived the ages and unrestrained destruction at the hand of man. Granite and alabaster. Tourists twist their necks and run up and down the scaffolding round the prostrate colossus of Rameses II with their cameras at the ready while he gazes stonily at the azure Egyptian sky.

The alabaster Sphinx in the centre of the palm grove sings a lilting song of ancient Egypt into the evening breeze . . .

Java P. O. 2878

Throughout the whole of Upper Egypt the course of the Nile is lined by endless fields of sugar cane; their strong stalks two metres high are anchored deep in the mud of the Nile and the deep green of their long sword-shaped leaves contrasts strangely with the yellow of the desert which lies in wait beyond the barrier of the Nile floods, ready to destroy all life.

Below Luxor can be found the largest sugar factory in Egypt; it processes a good third of the Egyptian sugar crop. When we arrived they were feverishly preparing for the new campaign, which starts round about Christmas. Along the dusty roads children were nibbling the sweet stalks of the ripening cane, while in the Nag Hammadi sugar works mechanics were cleaning

transporters which would soon be swallowing up 6,000 tons of sugar cane a day. Not for a second are the wheels of this giant works allowed to stop; here six hundred and seventy thousand tons of raw material is processed in a season.

Almost seven thousand wagons of crude sugar is sent from Nag Hammadi to the refinery in Lower Egypt. The works has its own power station, several hundred kilometres of narrow-gauge railway lines, fifty railway engines and over 1,200 wagons for the transport of sugar cane. The most interesting thing in the whole factory is the way they get their fuel. About fifteen years ago the management bought 2,000 tons of coal from India, and this supply has remained almost untouched to this day. The coal is used to heat the boilers during the first two or three hours after production is started up at the beginning of the campaign, until the first pressed cane waste comes off the line. This is then used to heat the boilers, being quite as good as coal, as well as serving to produce building material and potash. Cane molasses is as valuable a raw material for the distilling industry as is beet-molasses in our country. Recently Swedish specialists have finished preparations for the production of packing paper and newsprint in Nag Hammadi, from the surplus cane waste which was neither burnt nor processed.

It was fifty years ago that the first consignment of sugar cane seed from Java arrived in Egypt. The improved breed soon gained favour at the expense of the various native kinds of cane, which are today used only for animal feed. The Egyptian *kasab baladi* cane yielded to cane from the other end of the world, Java P. O. 2878.

And Egypt stopped importing sugar from abroad.

The beating of 50,000 wings

At the point where the great loop of the Nile below Luxor straightens out and flows to the north-west, you will find the little village of El Kasr. The tall chimney stacks of the modern sugar factory at Nag Hammadi, a few kilometres away, strike a disturbing note in the biblical appearance of the countryside, but in El Kasr you will see something that no Baedeker mentions but which is unique throughout the world. It is hidden from the gaze of man behind high walls which remind one of a deserted military fortress. A few dozen steps away you can see two round huts with conical roofs, hidden beneath the shade of giant *dom* palm trees. Here Prince Yussuf Kamal ed Ding comes from time to time to enjoy his strange hobby.

If you arrive in El Kasr about nine in the morning or late in the after-

noon, when the sun is already sinking behind the leaves of the palm trees, you will see thousands of pigeons flying down to the banks of the Nile to drink before they get their evening feed. Then the narrow gates of this mysterious building open in front of you and you find yourself in a typhoon of countless pigeons' wings. You cannot see two yards ahead for the thousands of pigeons circling close round you, settling on your shoulders and on your shoes and beating your face with their wings.

Doing your best to work your way through this incredible cloud of pigeons' wings you try in vain to find a convenient moment to uncover the view-finder and use your camera, before a layer of dirt settles on the lens. Then there is a moment's peace, for the figure of a caretaker appears in the living whirl of wings and heads, bearing a basket and a giant apron full of grain for the birds. The cloud of wings sinks to the ground and the spacious courtyard of this pigeons' palace changes into a restless sea rippling in all directions. The grey pigeons' wings undulate in one united flood. The birds take no notice of you moving through their midst and you have to take good care not to tread on them. The famous pigeons of Venice have serious competitors here.

You can look over the ingenious labyrinth Prince Yussuf Kamal ed Ding had built for his protégés. You almost have to kneel down to get into the various sections of this "pigeons' barracks", between the mud walls with their innumerable ledges and nooks. Thousands of egg-shaped clay vessels, looking like round drainage pipes, have been let into the walls in rows. These form an unusual habitation, but a practical one, for the pigeons' "rooms" are built from both sides of the wall and thus make the best use of the available space. The pigeons sitting on their eggs are not at all disturbed, and just thrust their heads out of their nests. There are over twenty thousand pigeons' nests built into the walls of Kamal's farm, but nobody knows the exact number of birds there, for many nest elsewhere and fly up only when the basket and the apron full of grain appear in the courtyard.

The hurricane of pigeons' wings rose into the air again when we went outside to take a few shots from the roof of the farm. We had to cover our faces for protection against the furious beating of wings as we passed through the narrow gateway between the two courtyards. Here the pigeons prefer to fly through the gateway and save themselves the longer flight over the wall. When we went down to the Nile again the bank was literally covered with their grey bodies.

"How many pigeons do you sell in a week?" we asked our guide, to get at least one real figure, since he could give us no idea of how many "diners" he had to cater for.

He laughed and surprised us with his strange reply.

"Not a single one! I'd get the sack if Prince Kamal were to find out I'd hurt a feather on any of his pigeons — it's his hobby..."

We understood why the pigeons in El Kasr were so tame.

And we understood why the starving *fellahin* in El Kasr have no love lost either for Prince Yussuf Kamal ed Ding or for his pigeons.

Centimetres on which millions of lives depend

If you look round the Nile valley near Asyut during the time of the autumn floods, you will seek the Nile in vain, for the simple reason that you can see nothing else but its waters all round you, from the golden dunes of the desert several kilometres away to the west, right to the sienna coloured wall of the Mokattam hills to the east. The narrow line of the road, barely visible above the water, cuts through the swollen surface of the Nile rolling along. Only by the crowns of the palm trees, sticking up out of the muddy water like green fans, can you tell where the banks of the stream really lie.

There is perhaps no other country which can boast of having only one river throughout its territory. In Egypt there is the additional boast that theirs is the longest river in the world. The vast area of Egypt shrinks before your eyes to a mere strip of green tucked in between the rocks and the desert. That is the only way to imagine to oneself what a constant and often desperate struggle for water the Egyptian *fellah* has to wage. When the Nile begins to rise millions of eyes turn to Cairo, to the "Nilometer", the traditional augur of the fate of the country. The newspapers regularly print news of how many centimetres the water has risen during the past twenty-four hours. No international football results and no speeches in the United Nations are followed with half the interest at this time of the year, for the muddy waters of the Nile are the alfa and omega for Egypt, that on which life or death depends.

While in other lands floods bring destruction, in Egypt the *fellahin* wait for the floods as if for salvation. The sap in the stalks of the corn and the long rice stalks, the sweet juice of the mangoes and the scent of the orange groves and the blinding whiteness of the bursting pods of cotton — all that flows into Egypt down the channel of the Nile.

Every year when the Nile reaches its highest point the whole country celebrates the "festival of the Nile". Prayers of thanks are offered, and religious ceremonies, processions and brilliant firework displays express the Egyptians' joy and gratitude. The King, surrounded by public personalities, comes

to the banks of the river in Cairo and pays tribute to the "holy river" in a tent filled with all the luxury of the east, while crowds of poor people watch the fireworks from both banks.

But none of these poor *fellahin* watching the glittering drama of the fireworks realises, as he gazes, how great the interests of foreign monopolies are in his holy river. Hardly a river in the world has been such a profitable subject for speculation and at the same time such a powerful political instrument in the hands of foreign imperialists as has the Nile.

Looking through the statistics of Egyptian imports you are amazed to see that Egypt has to import corn to save the people from starvation. How can that be possible when one thinks of the proverbial fertility of the soil of Egypt? The answer comes in a round-about way from the Nile itself.

In order to rid themselves of their awkward dependence on the cotton-growers of America, British industrialists turned their gaze towards Egypt, and at the beginning of this century gave the incentive to build several dams on the Nile. They were not intending to industrialise the country — quite the contrary! By building dams which called for heavy investment and which brought unheard-of profits to British firms, they bound the country even more tightly with bonds of interest and taxes and with their arbitrary decisions about the sowing of crops. They forced the Egyptian *fellahin* to grow cotton instead of corn, and so cotton forms 80 to 85% of Egypt's exports, and Egypt is forced to import grain from India, Canada and Australia — through the medium of British grain merchants and British shipping firms.

Not one of the great Egyptian dams is utilised as a power station, not even the biggest of all, at Aswan, which was built in 1903 and later modernised. And yet there is a difference of quite 245 feet between the height of Cairo and that of Aswan, more than enough for the millions of tons of falling water to be turned not only into sap for the corn but also into kilowatts which could be harnessed to machines, to electric light bulbs, and to electric pumps.

Nothing of the sort. The English capitalists left the Egyptian *fellah* his firework displays at the "festival of the holy river", his gaze fixed on the scale of the "Nilometer" in Cairo and at the sinking level of the water in October. And for the rest of the year, until the next floods, they left him his work-worn hands.

The water held back in the reservoirs during flood-time then flows millions of yards along canals, irrigation channels and narrow mud conduits into the squares and oblongs of the tiny fields. But it does not flow of its own accord. From morning to night you can see thin ragged children stand-

ing waist deep in the water, turning the handle of an Archimedes' screw. Nor have these children any idea of the dread disease bilharziasis which seeps from the water into their bodies.

Through the spiral screw within this wooden drum more than fifteen feet long the water from the irrigation channels rises a few inches higher to reach the sugar-cane fields; their thirsty mud drinks up day and night water mingled with the sweat of the poor. Here the *fellahin* have neither asses nor cows. Human hands — and mostly the hands of women and children — pour moisture on to the earth just as they did many thousands of years ago, before anyone had heard of turbines and Diesel engines.

The further you go from Lower Egypt, from the level Nile delta, the more often you come across a different kind of pump. Here too human muscle is the only source of energy; it is monotonous and exhausting work, work without end. Fixed in the steep banks of the irrigation canals, which are often several yards deep, you see two poles of cane-stalks stuck together with mud; a cross beam is fixed to the top of the poles, with two long poles attached. Primitive leather jars and clay vessels fixed to the one pole pull up a few gallons of water when the other is pulled down by hand. You can see these Egyptian beam pumps built in two and three storeys, stuck in the sloping banks of the canals; these are the *shadoofs*. The deep pool of water beneath the middle *shadoof* is a primitive reservoir which holds the water just long enough for the *fellah* at the highest *shadoof* to bend his back and scoop it into another leather jar and pour it out into the ditch running round his field.

If you hear the wailing sound of the *sakia* you know you are in a wealthier part of the country, where at least at the pump the work of human muscles has been replaced by that of water-buffaloes or cows. From sunrise to sunset they walk blindfolded round a toothed wooden wheel until they are exhausted. In vessels fixed to the circumference of a second, vertical wheel the water rises from the depths slowly, drop by drop . . .

In the autumn months, when the level of the Nile starts rising rapidly, the *shadoofs* and *sakias* lie idle for a while. This is the moment for which the *fellah* has been waiting for many long months. His little field disappears beneath the water for several weeks; the enormous toothed wheels of the *sakias* are dragged up for a time on to the high banks along the roadways and near the cottages, so that the water cannot carry them away. The slender palm trees gaze at their reflection in the ruffled mirror of the water. Far away, on the banks of the "great river", beneath the slender minarets of Cairo, the "Festival of the Nile" is being celebrated in the royal presence.

The *sakias* are silent . . .



Chapter Fourteen

FROM KARNAK TO THE VALLEY OF THE KINGS

The speedometer showed only one hundred and eighty kilometres from Nag Hammadi when asphalt appeared on the road again, after almost seven hundred kilometres of mud roads.

According to the map, we should not yet have been in Luxor, but the irrigation canals, the naked fishermen, the *fellahin* and the road-menders with their casks of water all suddenly disappeared, and there were houses on both sides of the road. Here was the Luxor soda-water factory. A few streets further on we came to a sudden stop, charmed by the delightful picture which suddenly appeared before us. The broad current of the Nile was rolling along on the right side of the road in its vast bed bordered with green. Scattered along the banks typical Nile sailing-boats were anchored; fishermen were resting after their day's work.

To the left of the road behind iron railings, the giant pillars and architraves of the famous Luxor temple appeared, ochre-coloured stone bathed in the rosy glow of the setting sun.

We had not expected such a surprise . . .

A royal necropolis with a crown of green

The immortal monuments of Amenhotep III and Ramesse II more than three and a half thousand years old — and fifty yards away an asphalt highway and modern motorcars. Nowhere else in Egypt with the possible exception of the pyramids in Giza has the inquisitiveness of foreigners brought about such an impertinent familiarity with the majesty of the ancient Egyptian monuments, thousands of years old, as in Luxor.

The vast courtyard with its double row of pillars shaped like bundles of papyrus leaves an indelible impression of elegance on you although the massive architraves are sticking sixty-five feet up above your head.

In several places the sand beneath the foundations has subsided beneath the thousands of tons of stone and the cracking blocks poised above the papyrus capitals give you a feeling of danger. But it took three and a half thousand years before Nature proved stronger than the mathematical exactitude of the architects of ancient Egypt. These proofs of their ingenuity and skill might have stood unchanged to this day had the damage not been speeded up by the great earthquake which occurred in Upper Egypt in the year 27 B. C. Modern archaeologists equipped with the most precise measuring instruments were not able to prove more than about a quarter of an inch displacement from the original position of the columns symbolising the bundles of papyrus. And these columns have a circumference of over twenty-six feet.

But Luxor is not only thousands of tons of stone in the shape of pillars, architraves, colonnades, hypostyles and fallen colossi bearing the likeness of the Pharaohs. The surroundings of Luxor are enchanting. The deep green on both banks of the wide Nile valley is like a living crown round the brow of ancient Thebes and the vast burial-ground, the royal necropolis. The crowns of the palms which a little while ago divided to reveal the view from the Luxor bank to the sienna-brown hills of Jebel el Kurna are slowly disappearing in the darkness, and here and there a light shines out on the right bank. The Luxor hotels are still empty and echoing. Not until half-way through December will they open their doors to foreign visitors who are willing to pay five pounds a day in order to be able to look over Luxor and nearby Karnak with a guide.

Three floating buoys shine in the middle of the Nile to warn Egyptian boatmen sailing from the Sudan to the delta of the dangerous sunken island. Twenty days from the moment when the outline of Luxor disappears on their right they will sail along the brightly-lit river bank in Cairo and wait beneath the rotating bridge of Abbas II which will open the road to the

Mediterranean for them. Once upon a time boats with giant colossi from the stone quarries in Aswan floated down here just as slowly; only dams and bridges were not yet there to stand in their way.

The largest temple hall in the world

In the Iliad Homer called the famous Thebes (the ancient Egyptian Veset) the "City of a Hundred Gates". This description was not quite accurate for like all other Egyptian towns Thebes was not fortified nor surrounded by battlements. The Pharaohs considered it unnecessary for they had no near neighbours who could threaten their chief town; but the main reason was that the town was always being extended and each of the Pharaohs added temple after temple. Probably what Homer meant were the entrances to these temples and not the entrances to fortifications.

And precisely the long peace undisturbed for centuries by foreign invasions enabled them to extend the metropolis of the new Egyptian empire to such an extent that even today, after more than three thousand years, it has no rival. In ancient times the extent of Thebes was only surpassed by the "labyrinth" of Amenemhet III, a ruler of the twelfth dynasty, who built a vast temple in Lower Egypt not far from present-day Faiyum. Nothing has remained of this building because under the Roman government it was used as a source of stone in a country where there was not sufficient durable building material. The rulers of Thebes, however, who spent almost two thousand years building Karnak, had an almost inexhaustible supply of limestone, sandstone and especially granite in the nearby quarries of Jebel Silsil and Aswan.

Thebes was not the capital of Upper Egypt at the earliest period of its history, like Memphis in Lower Egypt. Nearby Ermont, the town of the God of War, Monthew, threw the glory of Thebes into the shade until the twelfth dynasty. Today practically nothing remains of the original metropolis. What was not destroyed by the long centuries disappeared beneath the plaster of the new sugar factory in Armant, built on the ruins and from the ruins of ancient Egyptian Ermont.

All the historical facts and the descriptions in the thousands of books which have ever been written about Karnak in all the languages of the world fade as soon as you touch its soil. The fantastic dimensions and the massive proportions have a crushing, confusing effect. Every now and again, when you have got over the first shock of amazement, you ask yourself how man could have built anything so wonderful. You are passing through the greatest

temple hall in the world. Fine sand grates beneath your feet and the echo of your steps dies away somewhere among the last columns of the great hypostyle.

The main entrance gate to the Temple of Amon is of dimensions of which no other temple in the world can boast: a hundred and thirteen metres wide and forty-three metres high. Notre Dame in Paris covers an area only one-fifth greater than this single temple hall in Karnak. The forest of columns without a roof makes you feel giddy. The figures of the guides and the workers restoring the remains of the building barely reach to the second layer of stone blocks mounting towards the sky. The hundred and forty-three columns confuse visitors even now, after more than three thousand years. The columns on both sides of the central colonnade only measure thirteen metres while their twelve giant neighbours in the centre of the nave reach almost twenty-three and a half metres and measure almost four metres across. The blocks of stone of the architraves joining the heads of the columns weigh from sixty to seventy tons.

Like thousands of visitors before us we climbed up the narrow tunnel-like stairs in the nine-foot south wall of the temple to reach the top. The columns of the great hypostyle, placed at regular angles, were enclosed on both sides by the giant wings of the pylons of Ramesse I. High above the walls of the temple the obelisks of Queen Hatshepsowet and Thutmose I gleamed in the bright midday sun. The sea of stone ruins rolled from the narrow opening in the pylons on the southeast side in the middle of the temple of Amenrè, the God of the Sun, and met their reflection in the stagnant waters of the holy lake with the temple of King Taharka on its shores. On the southern side the cylindrical pylons stood up against the sky one behind the other, each stronger and more crushing than the last. Thousands of years ago the ceremonial processions led by the Pharaohs passed between these pylons to take part in the sacred sacrifices at the nearby temple of Luxor.

Today a dead, oppressive silence lies over the sloping pylons, the damaged statues and the felled columns. In front of the first pylons to the south stand granite statues growing to superhuman dimensions. They are nameless. Perhaps they portray one of the kings of the eighteenth dynasty, perhaps the despotic Ramesse II himself, who walked among these pillars for the whole sixty-seven years of his reign.

Not until the hieroglyphics were deciphered was the real character of this crowned swindler revealed after he had succeeded in deceiving the whole world for thirty centuries. Boastful, unrestrained in his ambition and pride, he handed down to his descendants the lies of his flatterers as his own

achievements and had the names of the Pharaohs on older buildings scraped off to replace them with his own name and chronicles of his heroism. In the old chronicles of heroic deeds it is perhaps impossible to find such shameless boasting as that of the "superhuman" deeds of Ramesse II. His court poet says of one such battle that the king was cut off from the rest of his warriors and saw that he was surrounded by two thousand five hundred war chariots and countless hordes of the enemy. Entirely alone, thanks only to the strength of his arm, he killed a great number of the enemy and turned the rest to flight.

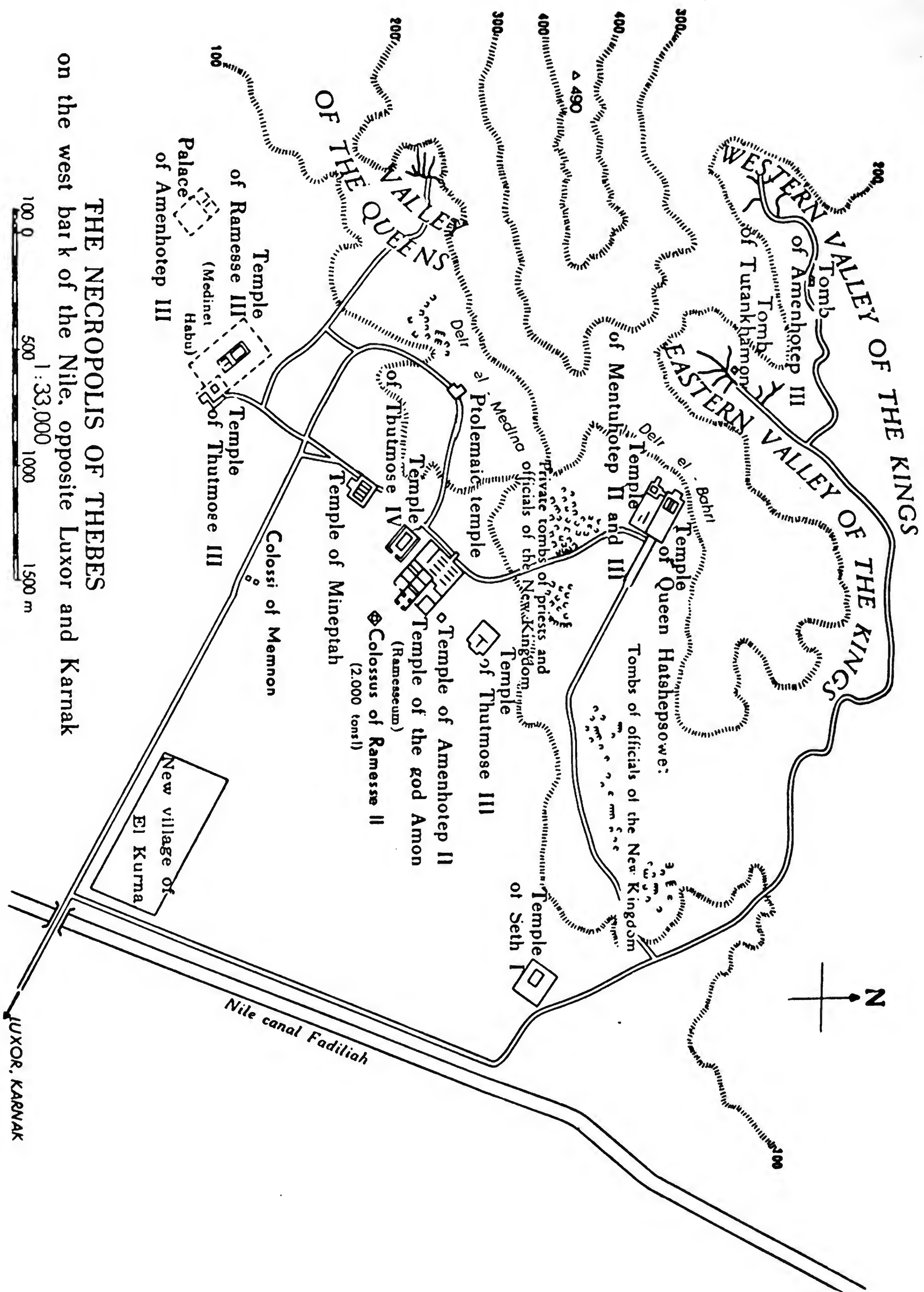
One of the statues of Ramesse lies in the middle of the Karnak sea of ruins — without a head. The disfigured head lies at the foot of the colossus like a symbol of Ramesse's senseless megalomania and mad desire for glory and immortality . . .

Eighty-six thousand Karnak statues

Between 1902 and 1909 the French scholar Legrain found seven hundred and seventy-nine stone statues and sphinxes and over seventeen thousand bronze statues in the courtyard between the southern entrance to the Southern Temple of Amon and the first pylons. This courtyard is about fifty metres long and not quite thirty metres wide.

Even so this fantastic discovery is only a fraction of what was once collected here. According to the great Harris papyrus, five thousand one hundred and sixty-four pictures of the gods and eighty-six thousand four hundred and eighty-six statues were counted in Karnak. Today these testimonies to the glory of Thebes fill countless glass-cases and museum rooms all over the world. Only the remnant which modern transport could find no means of carrying off remained there where they had been placed by the hands of thousands of ancient Egyptian workers and the ingenuity of a few architects and engineers of genius.

Even if the visitor to Karnak today finds it difficult to imagine the incredible efforts and exhaustion of the people who built these architectural wonders of the ancient world, the fact remains that the desire of the Pharaohs of the New Empire to outdo their forerunners and to set up monumental witness to their own glory encouraged the growth of thousands of artists, painters and skilled craftsmen. For long centuries these artists with proverbial patience covered the walls of the temples and the surface of the columns, architraves and ceilings with artistic creations whose subtlety and elegance drives into the background the crushing effect of the countless thousands of tons of stone beneath them. Thanks to these artists both the



walls of the temples and the rolls of papyrus were covered with historical inscriptions which threw light on the secrets of history and, unlike many other cultures long dead, brought the dead stone to life again . . .

We were leaving Karnak.

In the most southern corner of this extensive antique city is another holy lake with the ruins of the temple of the Goddess Mût which are in the most pitiable state. This dead burial-ground of statues is still waiting to be excavated. We saw parts of a giant granite statue whose head and torso were sticking up crookedly out of the sand. The rest is buried beneath the drifts of sand of thousands of years, which may still reveal surprising secrets. On the banks of the holy lake stand the dirty, stinking *fellahin* huts slapped together from mud. We remained speechless at the miserable sight. A few pigs were rolling in the muddy water and a bit further along some grubby boys came out of the water and made themselves comfortable on the warm granite base where once upon a time stood a larger-than-life statue of one of the Pharaohs.

How much of the inexorable law of history was revealed in that simple picture! Over three thousand years ago a powerful Pharaoh had this monument erected to himself in his desire for immortality. His mummy has crumbled in the dust and his statue has been swallowed up in the mud of the holy lake.

The Egyptian *fellah*, descendant of the ancient Egyptians who built Karnak, lives today just as he did hundreds of centuries ago. Chance placed the symbol of his immortality before our gaze on that very same stone where once rose the statue of a Pharaoh. These grubby little naked lads had nothing in common with the majestic grandeur of granite colossi, but there was life in them.

Without sentimentality and without royal magnificence Egypt herself lives on in them, as immortal as the Great River . . .

The secrets of Tutankhamon's grave

More than a thousand years after Khufu, Khafrè and Menkaurè had built their giant tombs on the Giza plain, other Pharaohs and high officials of their courts began to build opposite the capital of Upper Egypt, Thebes, among the limestone cliffs of the Jebel el Kurna hills.

Only the wide stream of the Nile, which rose in the summer months to lap over the edges of the funeral temples, divided the famous city of the living from the equally famous burial ground where in the course of time

not only the Pharaohs but thousands of their servants and courtiers as well found their last rest. Those who built these tombs were only too aware of the fate of their predecessors' tombs in Lower Egypt, and knew that the high piles of the pyramids were a direct invitation to thieves to steal the rich treasures laid in the tombs along with the embalmed bodies. Instead of building artificial hills over the bodies of their dead kings they found a quicker, cheaper and more efficient way and began to tunnel into the hills created by nature, to make their home after death there. For this purpose they chose a valley between cliffs, where beneath their hands long passages, secret chambers, deep pits and cells were bored. Here after the death of the kings came all the wealth they had accumulated during their lives.

The stony path from the Luxor ferry opposite the Winter Palace Hotel leads past the house where the famous egyptologist Carter lived. Then it digs into the torn cliffs, at the foot of which lie giant blocks of stone and piled up rocks. The path climbs winding upwards until it reaches the sentry-box at the barrier. You are in the famous Valley of the Kings, which has so often held the rapt attention not only of a narrow circle of scholars, but of the whole of the world.

A quarter of a century ago this name once more filled long columns in the newspapers of all countries, when from its narrow passages treasures of immeasurable historical and real value were carried out to the light of day. From the small space behind the sentry-box, where you are greeted by dark Sudanese wearing the uniform of the Egyptian police, footpaths run in several directions among the slopes of sand and rocks. From each of these paths passages lead off to the underground tombs of the kings. The weather-beaten cliffs of the first Valley of the Kings hide sixty-two tombs, while in the second valley only two have so far been discovered. The third valley was used only for the burial of queens and princesses.

About noon on November 4th 1922 Howard Carter, on the orders of his employer Lord Carnarvon, ordered his workmen to stop excavating. He was discouraged by the long years of fruitless searching for the tomb of Tutankhamon, whose name had been found written in another tomb. When the workmen saw how upset Carter was, they went on with their work against his orders. Towards evening they found beneath piles of stones a flight of steps. Carter started work again with renewed hopes of success. That was the beginning of his fame and another stone in the rich mosaic which has enabled scholars to fill in the picture of the life of the Pharaohs of Egypt and their court.

On the twenty-sixth of November a long passage leading to the tomb was opened up. At the end of this passage was a spacious hall filled with

articles of priceless worth — a royal throne of gold, sacrificial vessels, amphorae, food, small ornaments of gold, coins and weapons. It had all been scattered about the hall, leaving no room for doubt that thieves had at some time visited the tomb; being disturbed at their job they had left in a hurry. This was also proved by the original seals affixed to the tomb by the royal inspectors after they had found nothing missing. These seals did indeed keep the original secret of the tomb for many centuries.

The hall containing the funeral effects and a wealth of other articles had no exit with the exception of a small chamber opposite the entrance from the passage, but Carter did not allow himself to be deceived by the massive stone wall on the right hand side, covered with royal insignia. He had it broken through, and so on February 16th 1923 after twenty-three centuries human eyes once more gazed on the rich cases into which the body of the young king Tutankhamon had once been laid. The world saw a treasury of immense value, and was able to imagine how wealthy must have been the tombs of famous kings who were able during their long reigns to prepare for their after-life with all due pomp. Young Tutankhamon was not an important ruler, for he died at the age of eighteen after a reign of only nine years. Nevertheless he was accompanied to the grave by riches which today arouse fantastic speculations on the unimaginable wealth of the court of Ancient Egypt.

Inside the enormous wooden case covered both without and within in beaten gold was a smaller case equally richly ornamented. It held a third case of similar appearance, which could be opened like the other two. This third case was found to contain a fourth.

Not until the fourth case was opened was the sarcophagus discovered, made of yellow crystal sandstone with a granite lid. This stone sarcophagus held three coffins, each more richly decorated than the last. The thick layers of gold, semi-precious stone, faïence and glass were decorated with bas-relief portraits of the young king in gold; his embalmed body was lying in the third coffin, of pure gold. Close to the dead king were valuable possessions he had loved during his life.

Today the chambers of the tomb are empty. Only the stone sarcophagus remains in its original position in the funeral chamber, with one of the three coffins in which the king's mummy had lain. Through the glass lid of the coffin you can gaze at the motionless face, lit by soft lights. The funeral chamber is filled with a heavy silence which oppresses you.

All the rest of the wealth has been moved away from its underground hiding-place in the cliffs of Jebel el Kurna to the Cairo Museum, where it fills the whole of the front of the upper floor. Strong guards are on watch,

and police armed with rifles patrol between the glass cases. The room in which the two coffins and the innumerable gold articles from the tomb have been housed is protected by a strong iron grating, with a notice in three languages forbidding more than twenty people to enter at a time.

And so Tutankhamon can now see, during the visitors' season, long queues of people in front of the new resting-place of his golden coffin and his royal treasures; they are waiting to spend a few minutes looking down through the plate-glass of a museum case at the golden mask bearing his likeness. Over seven hundred kilometres away to the south, where his body was originally laid, tons of stone are resting, having given up the secret they had guarded for over three thousand years.

Hundreds of pages have been written describing mysterious happenings connected with the curse supposed to follow those who disturb the peace of the Pharaohs. In Egypt the rumour is current that the man who discovered Tutankhamon's tomb and was the first to enter it, Carter, died soon afterwards in mysterious circumstances. In fact he died in 1939, seventeen years after his famous discovery. When the mummy of another king was being placed in its glass case in the Cairo Museum the hand of the Pharaoh rose with a sudden movement and struck the glass lid. Scholars explained this happening soberly, by the action of the heat, changes in the humidity of the air, and the action of light on the dried-up swathings of the mummy, used to complete darkness for thousands of years. The Egyptian museum attendants panicked at the sight of the Pharaoh "coming to life" and fled from the scene in dismay; one of them was trampled on in the mêlée. Superstitious Egyptians once more attributed his death to the power of the Pharaohs, undiminished after thousands of years.

Fishermen round the Memnon colossi

Right in the middle of the necropolis on the west bank of the Nile beneath the giant cliffs of the Jebel el Kurna hills, from Carter's house past the terraced temple of Queen Hatshepsowet, past the tombs of the aristocrats and the famous Ramesseum right up to the vast temple of Medinet Habu, the huts of the local inhabitants are scattered. The village bears the same name as the broken cliffs above it — El Kurna.

The little huts of mud plaster look somehow out of place among these centuries-old temples, dead witnesses to the luxury and ostentation of the Pharaohs. They are inhabited by the descendants of those craftsmen, priests, painters, gold-beaters, sculptors and embalmers who were once engaged on

preparing their divine rulers a home after death. It seems incredible that the original inhabitants stayed here, and did not intermarry with the inhabitants of the other bank of the Nile. Their language still preserves many expressions which are not common in the popular Arabic of Egypt. They preserved their characteristic songs, which are quite different from the folk songs of contemporary Egypt. And last but not least, they have preserved the remarkable artistic talent of their forbears.

It sometimes happens, of course, that they show this talent in an unfortunate manner, which embarrasses even world-famous scholars.

The excavations carried on by a certain English egyptologist were drawing to a close. The workmen, who sensed that their source of income was drying up, took care to see that work went on and brought them in further wages. They carved a granite statue in true ancient Egyptian style and buried it among stones and debris in the sand. Then they "discovered" it. Just in time, for the scholars were already packing up.

The excitement roused by the discovery of such a rare work of art meant that extensive operations were continued, of course without result. Meanwhile the statue was "identified" and housed in the Cairo Museum. Not for years was it discovered to be a very successful forgery. The statue was quietly removed from its case, but the perpetrators were never discovered.

After the discovery of Tutankhamon's tomb dozens of forged articles "found in the tomb" were discovered. They originated in the workshops of the El Kurna gold-beaters and did a roaring trade among wealthy Americans, who paid fantastic sums for them. But even the tombs were not to be secured against the people from below the necropolis. The guardians of the various tombs, chosen from among the people of El Kurna, often turned into subtle thieves and in the end they had to be replaced by the Sudanese police. Pressed by the authorities in charge of excavation work the Government decided to move the entire population of El Kurna to a safe distance and destroy their cottages "to preserve the dignified character of the temples and the burial ground".

We saw the new village growing up not far from the canal, on the west bank of the Nile. Streets at right-angles; a mosque; spacious hygienically-built cottages; a covered well sunk really deep, giving good drinking water; a market place; cattle-sheds separate from human habitations; local government offices; a railway halt on the line which will link the new El Kurna with the sugar refinery in Armant.

We watched with interest as the workmen shaped the white limestone blocks and set them in mortar made of Nile mud and scraps of sugar cane and maize stalks. On the stone foundations rose walls of unbaked bricks, the

same material that Amenemhèt III used long ago when he built his famous "labyrinth" in Lower Egypt. The same material was used to build the royal granaries and storehouses in near-by Ramesseum, only a few hundred yards away from the new El Kurna. Life has stood still here, and now all of a sudden it has jumped several thousand years forward, here in the vicinity of the Valley of the Kings, for the children of the *fellahin* of the new El Kurna will soon go for water to a well equipped with a Diesel pump, will go to school by train, and maybe their fathers will even start ploughing the Nile mud with a modern tractor.

And the Egyptian government will realise the money it is investing in El Kurna twice over at once. First and foremost the inhabitants will have been moved to a safe distance from the treasures of the Valley of the Kings. And then, they will possess the first (and probably the only one for a long time to come) model village, which will be visited by all the wealthy and influential visitors to Egypt. The Egyptian government will use the modern village of El Kurna to show their care for the standard of living of the *fellahin*. And they will make successful propaganda of it, for the majority of foreigners will see no other Egyptian village, and will judge by this one the level of the whole of rural Egypt.

Not far from where this model village is growing up, there once stood the Amenophium, as it was called, the funeral temple of Amenhotep III. Today nothing is left of it but two giant colossi which no longer even bear the name of their creator. In many handbooks and scientific writings you still meet with the name given them by the ancient Greeks, the *Memnon colossi*. The son of the King of Ethiopia, the mythical hero who brought his armies to the help of besieged Troy and fought against Achilles, left his name to these enormous stone figures which are even larger than the famous statue of Ramesse II in the Ramesseum near by. This statue, from one block of stone, weighed two thousand tons before it was destroyed by an earthquake at the beginning of the Christian era.

The Memnon colossi also suffered during this earthquake and the monoliths became statues of Amenhotep II, sitting, bereft of the signs of his royal majesty, and carefully stuck together. For long after the earthquake these two statues uttered strange sounds, like the notes of a lyre. This was caused by the air warmed after sunrise passing through cracks in the stone. Visitors in the ancient days explained these sounds as greetings from Memnon to his mother, the goddess Eos, who addressed him every morning with the first rays of the sun. When later on the cracks in the stone were filled in, to preserve the statues from complete decay, the mysterious sounds ceased.

During the autumn floods the Nile fills the whole vicinity of what used

to be Amenophium, and from the first rays of the sun until the sky grows red in the evening the stone twins look at their reflection in the motionless mirror of the water. From time to time fishermen ruffle the silver surface with their nets, coming right up to the feet of the giants to get their due from the Nile. Perhaps their forefathers did the same, as they floated these stone giants from Aswan right down to the middle of Amenophium. The Memnon colossi, bereft of their royal crowns, stretch seventy feet from the edge of the water-mirror. The feet measure ten and a half feet. The human beings look like worms, as they come up with their three-cornered nets, drop them slowly into the shallow water, and wait patiently.

From time to time a silvery fish gleams in their nets . . .

Fifty pounds

In 1943 the General Inspector of Excavations in Upper Egypt, Mohamed Zakaria Goneim, initiated work in the Thebes necropolis not far from the building belonging to the Metropolitan Museum of New York. According to the information yielded by one of the papyri the tomb of Kheruef, minister of Queen Teye, should have been somewhere there.

After a great deal of preparatory work, in the course of which tons of fine sand and small stones were carted away, an underground passage was discovered, also covered by drifts of sand. After this had been cleared away an opening was made which was discovered to lead to a spacious hall, last visited in the days of Ptolemy. The first chamber was covered with a thick layer of soot, and it was clear that a fierce fire had once raged here, destroying the contents of the tomb and the coloured murals and carved bas-reliefs on the walls.

The interior of the tomb showed signs of considerable alterations. The whole of the left wall had been rebuilt and the original massive cannellate pillars, reminiscent of Greek Doric style, had been heedlessly hacked about in order to make straight walls for the new chamber. The next tomb contained well-preserved inscriptions and beautiful relief-work depicting the classical dances of the Egyptians.

Now further work has stopped. The pillars to support the roof, which threatens to subside, are unfinished. There are plaster joints in the wide crack, to check up on further subsidence. And the crack is growing wider.

Half the tomb beyond the wall dating from Ptolemaic times is still waiting to be entered and have its artistic treasures discovered. The results of three years of devoted work and inexhaustible patience, experiments and

delight at bringing to light a buried work of art, all has been cut short. Credit was exhausted. A mere fifty pounds had been provided for the workmen's wages, for stone, timber, cement and paint. And yet these mere fifty pounds were enough to add new treasures to the already countless proofs of the exquisite taste of the ancient Egyptians.

Over half the work had been finished successfully, and another fifty pounds would more than suffice to uncover the second half of the tomb, undamaged by fire, and certainly far more valuable. But in Egypt there is no money to spare for the work of archeologists. The majority of the famous scholars are foreigners, who have worked on their own initiative and with their own funds, or paid by some enterprising museum which then simply carted off the wealth of ancient Egypt, mostly to the Museums of Paris, London and New York. What was left they sold at a profit to other less enterprising museums all over the world.

In Egypt itself, on the site of the excavations and in the Cairo Museum, remained only a small fraction of the historical monuments discovered, in particular those which it was too difficult to ship overseas. And all because Egypt has never supported its own archeologists and opened wide the gates of the old metropolises and burial grounds to foreign initiative.

Not even today is there fifty pounds to spare in Egypt for Mohammed Zakaria Goneim to finish his life's work. Your mind flies back to the pompous decorations of the Cairo streets on the last day of *ramadan*, to the thousands of mounted and foot police, to the baldequins in the main streets of the city and to the tons of fine sea sand which had to be strewn over the paving before the royal procession could pass along the street. The fantastic sums of money spent every year on the archaic magnificence of the royal court dance before your eyes, a magnificence which is an immoral survival in a land where millions of people live in such indescribable misery as in Egypt.

Egypt cannot afford fifty pounds to finish excavation work on the tomb of Queen Teye's minister . . .

We stood silently with Zakaria Goneim in "his" tomb. The astral figures of the ancient Egyptian dancing girls stood out in the delicate contours of the carved walls and stood in line to perform their dances just as they did many thousands of years ago. After a long silence a gentle, lowered voice broke the spell in the tomb.

"Can you hear them singing and playing? . . . I come here from time to time to hear the sound of the ancient Egyptian lutes and dulcimers . . ." The eyelids blinked rapidly behind the thick glasses in unusual emotion.

Zakaria Goneim went out without a word into the desert beneath the cliffs of El Kurna.

Allahu yahsin . . .

The hot day died over the Luxor valley. The fishermen tied their boats to the banks of the river and rested. The southern walls of the temple of Medinet Habu with the boastful inscriptions describing the heroic deeds of King Ramesse grew rosy in the light of the setting sun and the high trembling note of the cicadas floated over the fields of ripening sugar cane to the distant Nile. On the other bank the giant hypostyles of Karnak and Luxor cast their long shadows. Just as every evening, the hungry jackals shambled round the pillars where the ancient Egyptian sculptor had carved their likeness.

We stepped on board a Nile *felucca* with limp sails on the tall mast. Two oarsmen held out their hands as we stepped gingerly along the narrow plank leading from the muddy bank to the boat. Then they sat to the oars, leaned their feet against the seat opposite, and the soft splash of water broke the evening silence.

Then a voice, followed by a second, added itself to the rhythmical sound. An old boatman, whose clear-cut features had struck us in the morning, was encouraging his sons, keeping time to the oars. We could only catch a few words of his expressive, rhythmic Arabic, and we were amazed.

"Be strong, my son, be strong! Forward, forward, to the other bank! Let not our guests reproach us! Onwards, onwards! . . ."

"*Allahu yahsin, Allahu yahsin, Allahu yahsin . . .*" came back the regular song like the sons' answer to their father's word. "Oh, Allah, patron of boatmen; oh, Allah, the strengthener . . .!"

The lights on the other shore grew nearer. Lighted buoys floated past the side of the *felucca* and then the long poles with their iron tips struck the Nile mud a few times and the water once more splashed regularly beneath the powerful strokes of the oars.

"*Min hena, ugrus, ugrus!*"

"Seize the oar, onward, be strong!"

In the evening when we sat with the doors of our Tatra open, listening to the Czech news followed by a radio concert from Prague, sitting in the garden of the Luxor management of the excavation work, we could still hear the rhythm of the *felucca*: "*Allahu yahsin, ugrus, ugrus, Allahu yahsin — min hena, Allahu yahsin . . .*"

The lowered headlights of the car caught in the darkness of the garden the outlines of two statues Zakaria Goneim had brought from the site — Ramesse II and the goddess Sakhmet with a lion's head. Down below on the river bank the fishermen were singing to themselves softly.



Chapter Fifteen

THIS IS THE MAN WHO BURIED THEM

The road maps of Egypt end at Luxor. But even so very few visitors to the monuments of ancient Egypt dare to undertake the journey from the Nile delta to Upper Egypt by car. Almost all tourists prefer a sleeping berth in the express, an airplane cabin or a fast excursion steamer to the dusty road.

Beyond Luxor even this road ends. It runs for a few dozen kilometres along the banks of the canal which gradually changes into a pool of drying mud, and then suddenly the road turns off over a doubtful bridge which looks like an impassable obstacle; it is a narrow sandy track to Esna. You climb out of the car and full of fears for the chassis measure the enormous rocks in front of the bridge which goes up in steps. And then you very carefully cover the sixty-five feet between the high banks of the canal, bump over the embankment of the narrow-gauge railway and plunge without a pause into the desert. This dusty track, faithfully following the undulating terrain, is the last road of any description in the European sense of the word. Here you will no longer meet any cars, only from time to time does a stray vehicle set out on the road to Aswan, the last outpost of Upper Egypt.

Jagged cliffs, giant blocks of granite, worn by the wind and time into strange shapes, create fantastic scenery along the road. The thermometer shows 86° in the car, and in the sun the indicator stops at 122°. Along the road lie the whitened skeletons of camels. Then for a while the path draws near to the Nile and in Akaba it touches the railway line. All at once mountains appear again reminding you of school pictures of the Great Wall of China. The path climbs upward in innumerable hairpin bends between the weather-beaten cliffs just like the flat ridge of the Wall which once upon a time was built to defend China against invasion by the Mongols from the north.

The sun was slowly sinking to the west when we passed a picturesque village with its terraced houses literally stuck on the side of the cliff. Soon the Nile appeared again in front of us and as twilight fell we came on to asphalt again. It looks almost unnatural, for the road to the south ends with this bit of asphalt. In Aswan the railway too comes to the last station. The only means of transport linking the north of Africa with the south are the Nile steamers.

A vacuum between Cairo and Capetown

When we were preparing for our journey round the world and going to great trouble to get hold of maps from every possible source, we were able to get relatively accurate information about the state of the roads, the distances, passability at various seasons and the route followed by the roads in practically all the countries through which we wanted to travel. Among our papers we had a diagram of the roads on Sumatra, just as we had a map of the newly-built strategic road in Burma. We knew in advance the gradients of the roads in Abyssinia, all the gradients of the Great Mountain road in Pamir and the as-yet-unbuilt stretches of the South American highroad linking Brazil and Argentine with Mexico.

Only the overland route from Aswan in Upper Egypt to Khartoum in Sudan remained a complete mystery. Not in one of the dozens of travel books, even the most recent, was there any mention of the possibility of driving through this territory. All the expeditions which have ever set out from north to south stuck in Aswan and went on to the south down the Nile. In specialist libraries and map collections we could not find the slightest detailed reference to the state of the route from Aswan to the south. All our attempts to fill in this vacuum covering more than a thousand kilometres were in vain. Only an American war atlas from the year 1945 showed a rough link between Aswan and Wadi Halfa along the west bank of the

Nile for a distance of about twelve millimetres on the map of Africa. Nowhere was there any mention of the passability and character of the route.

Shortly before setting out from Cairo we visited an English colonel, Le Blanc, the former commander of the transport section in Marshal Montgomery's staff during the time of the North African campaign, and one of the best experts on transport conditions in this area. A few months previously he had finished a survey journey through Egypt and Sudan and had managed with two jeeps to drive from Aswan to Wadi Halfa along the eastern bank of the Nile; although he had specially equipped vehicles for the terrain he met with extraordinary difficulties. In Cairo, through the medium of the Sudan Agency, we had pressed the Sudan government in vain to give us a permit to drive through the desert to the south from the Egyptian frontier. After several weeks of repeated requests we had to be content with the promise that the answer would be sent by telegram to Aswan. According to the strict regulations of the Sudan authorities permission was only given in exceptional cases for convoys of vehicles to travel from Wadi Halfa to Khartoum and that never in the rainy season which is from the beginning of October to the end of June. Permission was never given for single vehicles.

Our first general information about the Nubian desert we got from the Sudan Agency in Cairo but not even here could they provide more detailed maps. In the Egyptian Auto Club we were given Le Blanc's incomplete description of his journey with a rough itinerary and a list of the most difficult stretches of the road along the eastern bank of the Nile. The information given to us by individuals we met was so various that in the end we could not believe any of them.

Into "No Man's Land"

It is not usual to drive over European roads with a compass on your knee.

It is not even usual in Africa. Not even along the north coast, where nowadays a driver can plan his journey from Casablanca to Alexandria and stick to his plan. He can do this because for six thousand kilometres he is driving over an asphalt road, even if it is pitted here and there, and because the signposts are more or less reliable all the way.

It is not even usual to travel with a compass on the Egyptian frontier to the south of Aswan. After the war ended occasional groups of demobilised soldiers did it, wanting to get home earlier than a year or two when they succeeded on getting on one of the rare ocean steamers. A few convoys of specially equipped vehicles usually loaded with only the most essential

reserves of water and petrol were successful. And then two such expeditions failed. It took *askaris* on camels several days to find the lorries half covered with drifts. They dug a common grave in the desert and on their return to Shellal they sent a short official report to the War Ministry in Cairo.

It is no wonder, therefore, that instead of following a compass on their knee, drivers prefer to lean calmly on the railings of the Nile steamers struggling against the current of the longest river in the world. It leaves them plenty of time to look at the treacherous desert and to prepare their plans for continuing their journey over dry land from Khartoum to the south.

We lost six long days in Aswan. We negotiated with the Egyptian authorities, sent telegrams, explained, persuaded, sent more telegrams and waited . . .

"It will be difficult," said the *mudir* in Aswan, the chief administrative official in Upper Egypt, after reading our letter of recommendation from Luxor. "It will be very difficult. The only thing I can do for you is to speak to the captain of the frontier guard. He knows what he has to do. Have you got a permit from Cairo?"

"No, we haven't. We were told that permits were issued in Aswan."

"That's not true. Only the Ministry of War in Cairo has that right. But see what you can do at the frontier guard command. I'll ring them up."

A few kilometres beyond Aswan, on the eastern bank of the Nile, on the edge of the desert, lies the last outpost of Egypt. Shellal. It is a lonely fortress with a customs office and hanging round the walls are military belts with ammunition and a few rifles. Everything around is empty and deserted. Only the heat of the desert breathes from the white walls, getting a little cooler in the few hours of night before the birth of a new day.

It is one of the strangest customs offices in the world. Here you cannot see any frontier barriers such as are inevitable at every customs office. You would seek in vain its counterpart somewhere just round the corner in the neighbouring country, a few hundred metres further down the sandy track.

Shellal is the embodiment of "finis terrae".

The nearest Sudanese customs office is three hundred and fifty kilometres away. It reminds you of two enemy armies afraid to meet or to step into "no man's land", into the land of yellowish-grey desert, thirst and slow death.

Calm and a deadly silence reign in the Shellal fortress, broken only from time to time by an armed patrol of *askaris* on camels, coming off duty, and by the rare arrival of a river steamer which once in a blue moon casts anchor on the banks of the Nile down below.

It is no wonder that the people living behind these walls have lost the sense of time.

"Good morning," said the captain of the frontier guards slowly in answer to our greeting as we stepped into his office. He pushed his chair back noisily and reached up on the wall for his belt to fasten it round his linen uniform.

"They telephoned me from down below. What is it that you really want?"

We repeated our request to be allowed to continue our journey to the south. "We want to carry out an endurance test of our car in the desert..."

"That is out of the question. You are certainly aware that two expeditions met their deaths not long ago. Since then the government will not allow anyone to go through."

"Colonel Le Blanc drove through here this year in April with two jeeps."

"How do you know that?" asked the captain in surprise.

"We talked to him in Cairo three weeks ago and he gave us all the information we need about the most difficult stretches. In addition we are very well equipped. We have spare parts with us and we can do our own repairs on the spot if necessary. We have an excellent aircraft compass from a Spitfire, tinned food for a month, two canvas waterbags holding eighty litres, and reserves of petrol. We've got special military sand channels with us. They are strips of canvas strengthened with bamboo for putting under the wheels in soft sand. We don't need to take water with us to make up for evaporation because we have an air-cooled engine. And just look at our tyres. There's not a sign of wear on them..."

"How many cars will there be?" the captain interrupted our explanations.

"One," was the brief reply.

"Then there is no point in talking about it. The Egyptian government will not give you permission because they will not take responsibility for your lives."

"We will go at our own risk."

There was a short silence and then sharp Arab words of command rang out. A tall muscular Sudanese in sergeant's uniform stepped into the room and reported in an energetic voice.

"This man buried in the desert the members of two expeditions. They too had all given me a signed statement that they were setting off at their own risk," said the captain, accompanying his words with a meaning glance. "You are still young. I mean it for your own good..."

"Colonel Le Blanc got through with two cars. Can we get a permit if we take a second car with us...?"

"Write an application to the commander of the frontier guard in English and sign a declaration that you take all responsibility on yourselves," was

the brief answer, accompanied by an uncomprehending shake of the head. "But you must realise that if you don't get to Wadi Halfa in time *askari* search parties will be sent after you and aeroplanes from Lower Egypt will set out to look for you."

In the end the colonel received us but immediately refused our request.

"The captain has already told you that both the last parties to set out along the eastern shore came to a bad end. The desert to the west is so impassable that we even had to pull Colonel Le Blanc and his jeeps out of the sand. He preferred to go on along the eastern bank."

After a long conversation the colonel was silent for a moment, slowly stubbed his cigarette and then suddenly rose from his chair.

"All right then, you can try — but under three conditions. You must take another car with you. You must show me what both cars can do in the desert. And then you must wait until a permit comes from Cairo. I don't want to have it on my conscience."

Eighteen wells over an area of 170,000 square kilometres

In the afternoon Major Nasif Iskander, the deputy police governor, came to see us in the little St. James Hotel and brought an unknown man with him.

"You said in the *mudiriah* that you were looking for a car to accompany you to Wadi Halfa. I've asked everywhere and nobody wants to risk it. Here is Abu Zaid Ismail. You might be able to talk him over if you could agree on the price . . ."

We bargained for a long time according to Egyptian custom.

"All right then, you give me thirty-five pounds. I wouldn't do it cheaper for my own brother," said Abu Said in the end, looking very downhearted to hide his inner satisfaction at driving a good bargain. "I've come down fifteen pounds for you. Nobody else would do it. Who's going to pay me if my Ford gets lost in the desert . . .?"

Thirty-five pounds was a royal wage. It meant seven thousand crowns for the journey to Wadi Halfa and the return journey on one of the flat boats which float down the Nile with the current. We would have bet our lives that Abu Said would not give three out of his thirty-five pounds to the driver and the guide who were to go with us.

The next day three cars drove out towards the Aswan Dam beyond which the desert stretched into the distance; endless, sparkling with self-assurance, the desert silently threw us a gauntlet challenging to combat.

"And now just show me what your car can do in the desert," said the captain and gave the driver of his jeep orders to go ahead. "Drive after me."

The results of this test were such that a telegram went off to Cairo in the afternoon recommending the Ministry of War to allow us to travel through the "Great North Desert" in view of the exceptional qualities and technical fitness of our car.

"There's only one thing I don't understand," said the captain shaking his head. "How can your car run without water? Don't forget to tell Abu Said to give his driver a better jack. He'll need it for the Ford more often than you will . . ." It later turned out that he was right.

Two days later the fortress was astir.

A group of men of the Bisharin tribe were sitting in the shade before the door. They gesticulated excitedly with their hands and talked ten to the dozen, half naked, with wild curly hair and scarred faces. They had long curved daggers stuck into sheaths at their belts. The colonel and his adjutant had a long consultation in Arabic. Then the colonel went to the large map of Upper Egypt and northern Sudan hanging on the wall and shouted an order; one of the Bisharins came into the room. One question after another was fired and the colonel checked the answers by the map. Then it was the turn of the second Bisharin, the third, the sixth. We understood that the commander was choosing a guide to undertake responsibility for leading our expedition to Wadi Halfa. Five of the Bisharins failed to pass the test. Finally the colonel chose one who had been able to tell him from memory all the orientation points along the western bank of the Nile for more than three hundred kilometres.

"Tomorrow you must go to the *mudiriah* for a certificate that there is nothing against him or the driver as far as security and customs are concerned, so that they can be given a permit to enter Sudan; and from you I need a written declaration from the customs office here that your things have been passed."

"Can we make a drawing of the map for the sector we want to pass through?" we asked the colonel. The map was hanging behind him. "We have every confidence in our guide but we should like to know the main orientation points in order to check up."

"I'm sorry," answered the colonel shortly, "but it's a military map."

"But suppose the guide loses his way. What will be the use of our good compass if we are not able to correct our direction according to the heights marked on this map? It's the only help you can give us. Anyway it won't be very much help, it's only on the scale of one to five hundred thousand. A centimetre means five kilometres. You can't call that a military map."

"Very well then," agreed the colonel. "You can draw the main orientation points."

We stepped closer to the map. It represented an area of over half a million square kilometres. In the bottom left hand corner all eighteen of the wells were named; barely half of them held enough water, and most of the geographical notes about the wells were supplemented by the remark *brackish water* or *very brackish water*.

These eighteen wells were scattered over an area of 170,000 square kilometres, one third larger than the whole of Czechoslovakia. A dotted line led in a south-westerly direction from the Aswan dam to the Garra hills, and then turned rather to the south about twenty to forty kilometres away from the foot of the Sin el Kaddab hills. And then by the straight line we discovered a note in English: *Approximative direction*. There were a few orientation points marked, but no height was quoted for most of them. West of the Kaddab hills was the short remark: "Unknown, unexplored region . . ."

We thought of the old maps of Africa, full of blank spaces bearing the words *Hic sunt leones*. The only well in the northern sector we intended to drive through was about thirty kilometres away from our route and the exact geographical position was given: 23°54'N, 32°19'E. At some points the Nile was over a hundred kilometres away from our route, which would have meant several days' march in a hundred and twenty degree heat to fetch water.

The next day, after we had been in Aswan three days, the major came to us in the hotel and announced in a whisper that a telegram had just come from Cairo giving permission for us to travel through the desert. "But don't tell the Colonel you know," he added with a smile, and went away.

And so the die was cast.

An hour later the colonel sent for us and told us to see to the last formalities and to be ready in front of the Customs Office the next morning, together with our companion car. "You are lucky to have got permission from Cairo, I did not expect it."

We started a pilgrimage round Aswan, visiting the *mudir*, the governor of the Aswan area, the commander of the police, the health inspector, the frontier doctor, the passport officer, the representatives of the Sudanese authorities, the customs men, and goodness knows whom else. Long conversation and many questions were not enough to satisfy their curiosity, and in the evening we were invited to the Officers' Mess for a farewell session. It was obviously a social event in Aswan. We felt as if we were in the General Staff headquarters before a battle. From one side we heard advice and encouragement, from the other warnings and sceptical reminders.

"If you lose your way, don't lose your heads," said the major who had made the most serious impression on us from the very beginning. "Don't act hastily and don't try to find the right direction while you are still upset. Have a quiet night's sleep and start thinking about how to get out when you wake up next day . . ."

We acquired another certificate of vaccination for our crew, customs declarations, police certificates, certificates from the *mudiriah* and finally even the passport official's stamp in our passports. At least on paper we were leaving Egypt, although another two hundred kilometres or so of the desert separated us from her southern frontiers. After talking to everybody we discovered that nobody in Aswan knew the whole of the way to Wadi Halfa, on the left bank or on the right. Our guide had passed his test on the map, but he was quite unable to say what conditions were like for cars in that sector. Most people advised us to follow the west bank of the Nile, without knowing why. A choice of two unknowns.

"If anything happens to you the first day, in the worst terrain, you can get help from Aswan in a day on foot. But don't set out by day; wait for night and go by the stars."

Late in the evening we left the Officers' Casino and went for a last stroll through the Aswan *suk*, which was just waking up to night life. The patched and torn baldequins across the narrow space took on fantastic shapes in the flickering light of oil lamps. Among the crowd stepping round the piles of varied goods were *effendi* in white suits of European cut, Arabs in *gallabiabs*, Egyptian police and soldiers, tattered and half-naked nomads from the desert and a few curious tourists in shorts. The smell of roast mutton liver mingled with the smoke of charcoal and the pungent smell of the incense which curly-headed lads were burning in one booth after another for a small tip. The bubbling undercurrent of Arabic, Greek and English was broken every now and again by the braying of asses, and above it all wailed the grating gramophone records of Arab music from the cafés.

We automatically turned our steps towards the *mudiriah*, where our Tatra was waiting in the courtyard. In the afternoon we had given her a last check-up, cleaned the oil filter, put in fresh oil, filled up the vaseline in the grease guns, adjusted two valves and cleaned the ribs of the cylinders and the air cleaner to free them from the dust of the mud roads of Lower Egypt.

The engine was running like a wrist-watch.

"There's certainly enough petrol," we assured each other, calculating. "We've got 12 gallons in the tank, four two and a half gallon cans and four four-gallon sealed tins, that makes 46 gallons altogether. That would normally be enough for 1,700 kilometres."

"She'll probably need more in the sand, maybe three or even four and a half gallons a hundred kilometres. But it's got to last us, even if there isn't a drop of petrol to be had in Wadi Halfa . . ."

The reflection of the waxing moon rippled in the waves of the Nile below the Aswan dam, and its pale light was returned by the banks of soft sand on the other side.

Beyond the dunes the desert was waiting, silent, mysterious, and unknown . . .

The first round

It was a warm morning, a desert morning, the twenty-fourth of October.

The sun had no time for a ceremonial theatrical entrance, and did not even wear the wonderful crimson halo with which she had sunk to rest the evening before on the pillows of sand on the opposite bank of the Nile. She hurriedly rose through the agate line of the horizon and hungrily sped over the soft dunes, damp with the shadows and the dews of the night.

The desert was like a month-old lion cub: just as shy, just as gentle, just as playful — a lion-cub with no idea that he would one day become a lion, that his awkward feet would become powerful paws armed with sharp claws, and his soft muzzle a bloodthirsty maw.

It was better not to wait for the lion-cub of the morning to become the lion of midday.

Both cars stood before the fortress ready to set out. We were anxious to start off across the desert as soon as possible, to get over the worst stretch while the surface of the soft sand was still relatively firm with the morning dew. But the Great Bairam, the Mohammedan festival, changed our plans for us. We had to wait several hours for the commander to come back from the mosque.

Then followed another hour of formalities, photographs, and good advice.

"If you arrive in Wadi Halfa alone, I shall be forced to have you arrested for not obeying the government's orders. If the second car should meet with an accident you must leave them enough water and food and retrace your route to Aswan, even if you happen to be right in front of Wadi Halfa. You must sign a statement acknowledging this!"

The last photographs were taken, good wishes exchanged, and we set off.

We carefully followed the first car, which was travelling about a hundred feet ahead of us. We had fears for its low differential and soft springs. From now its fate was our fate. We drove over the last seven kilometres of

asphalt, ending on the Aswan dam itself. After two kilometres the regular drumming of the moving cars echoes from the banks of the sluices and is lost in the thunder of thousands of tons of water falling a hundred feet with a deafening roar. At the other end of the dam we gave the cars a last check-up and set off into the desert.

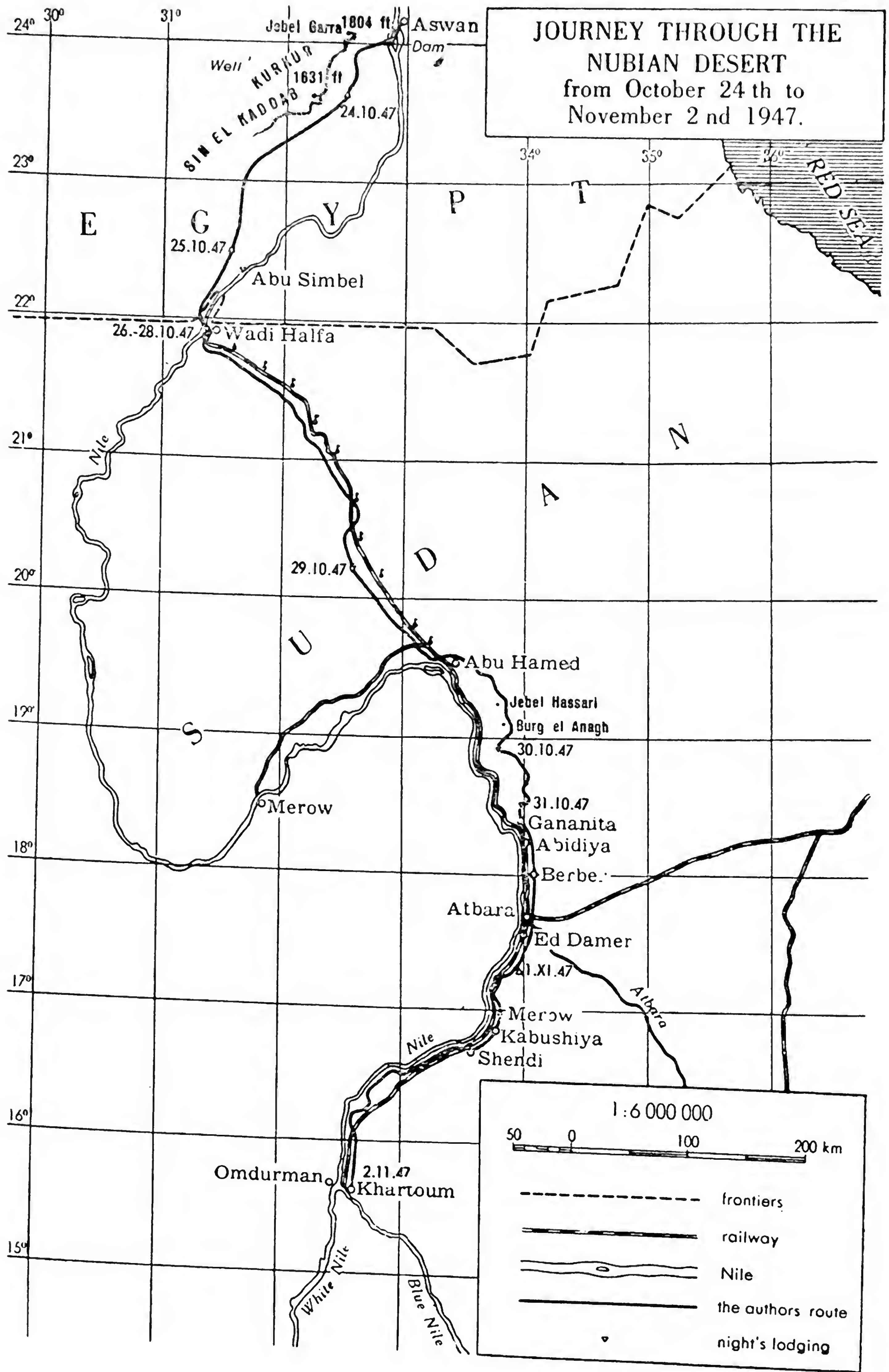
Mirek with the compass on his knee followed the path with the same careful attention as George, who had taken the wheel.

A steep slope cut across by sand drifts, a deep valley bridged by a double row of flat stones, another slope — and all at once we found ourselves on the endless plateau of the desert. It was quite different from the desert we had grown used to in Tunisia, Libya, or Lower Egypt; here we found little hillocks of small stones, sand, gravel, pebbles, and then more sand and stones. The row of telegraph poles which had appeared after we left the dam ran far away to the left and put an end to our hope of taking our direction by them.

The car in front of us began to founder, cascades of sand flew from the wheels, it skidded to the left and came to a dead stop. We hurriedly changed over to lower gear, stepped on the gas and passed the eight-cylinder Ford, but a second later our own wheels sank hopelessly into the sand. It was hard work to dig the cars out, raise them, and put sandchannels under the wheels; helping each other we managed to move five or ten yards forward — and the cars sank into the sand again over their axles. The narrow tyres of the Ford cut into the sand in places where we drove easily over the surface. Again and again we put the sandchannels under the wheels, moved a few dozen yards forward, and stopped again.

By two o'clock in the afternoon we had hardly got seven kilometres beyond the dam. The thermometer showed 107° in the shade. The sun beat mercilessly down on our heads and every minute and every yard was full of sweat and patience. The desert, that lion-cub of the morning, had changed to a lion lying in wait for its prey. The long shadows had disappeared and the desert was arrayed in cynical, poisonous yellow, burning to the touch and to the gaze. This was the sector where Colonel Le Blanc had stuck several times before returning, changing his route, and going over to the east bank of the Nile. We did not want to follow his example. Stick it out...!

After thirteen kilometres we came to better terrain, where fine gravel without sand gave us the possibility of driving more quickly. Every now and again we saw the tracks of military lorries and caterpillar vehicles, which tried this tremendously expensive way to get supplies to the North African front when the submarines in the Mediterranean Sea were the gravest threat



to supply lines. From time to time we passed piles of stones set on little hillocks; these were the only signposts. Then the undulating plateau appeared again, the hillocks covered with hard gravel. Here we could put on greater speed to give us a start for the sand drifts in the valleys.

At half past two we stopped for half an hour to give the cars a rest. The oil temperature indicator had risen to 230° and we were afraid the bearings would suffer. The Ford was boiling. Outside the temperature was 115° in the shade.

Far ahead of us the outlines of the Garra hills began to emerge. We set our direction by the rough map and our aircraft compass, and with the help of our Czechoslovak Aeronar telescope we made a guess at the distance. The three Egyptians from the Ford, the driver, the mechanic and the guide, had never seen either a compass or a telescope in their lives before and could not get over their amazement at our being able to name all the hills and point out the right way to Wadi Halfa. They could not understand how we could know these names if we had never been there before. The compass and the telescope seemed to have earned their deepest respect, for at every stop they came along to consult them.

After four o'clock we lost sight of the track.

The Bisharin was getting more and more uneasy, directing the Ford sharply to the left and then to the right again; he kept getting out to stand on the running-board as they drove, looking round the whole time. It was obvious that he had lost his way. Then the Ford stopped. By the time we caught up with them the three members of the crew were getting heated. We could only catch a word here and there in the flood of Arabic, but we gathered that they were arguing about the direction to take and not about the proportion of the agreed payment which was to fall to each. The argument got sharper and sharper. The mechanic was gesticulating wildly towards the Kurkur hills and the veins stood out on his temples as he poured a flowery stream of Arabic on the guide's head. The Bisharin gazed round at the compass as if begging for help.

We climbed a low, ribbed hillock where there was a better view, to determine our route. The telescope showed quite clearly the great sand slope on the east side of Jebel Garra. The barrier of the Kurkur hills runs south west. We were only six or eight kilometres away from the nearest spur of the hills, while the map showed our track some fifteen kilometres from the foot of the range. Our guide had obviously led us too far to the west. We changed our direction to the left and drove with care over a rocky saddle between two hills.

A few minutes before sunset we came upon the old tracks again. The

Bisharin smiled with satisfaction and tapped gratefully at the glass case of the compass, where the mysterious arrow was swinging round, moving over the equally mysterious marks round the metal rim whenever one of the white *sayyids* twisted the magic case in his hand.

"When did you last pass this way?" we asked the Bisharin.

"A long time ago, *yasidi*, a very long time ago. About ten years ago. I guided a caravan of camels to Wadi Halfa . . ."

"And since then you haven't been through the desert?"

"No, sir, I haven't. Nobody wanted to go this way with camels, there was not enough water and the camels died . . ."

The smoke of our camp fire rose to the starry sky. The driver of the Ford brought us two cups of strong Arab tea and offered us some more. We looked over the Tatra by the light of our flashlamps. The air cleaners were stuck right up with fine sand although the day before we had carefully washed them in petrol and lubricated them a little with oil. In the carburettor choke tube we found a sediment of fine sand dust about five millimetres thick, mixed with oil evaporation from the evaporation manifold.

"Put some sticking plaster from the First Aid case on the carburettor air pipe, will you? The insulation tape's no good. Tomorrow we'll have it full of dirt again and it might get into the cylinders. I'll finish writing up the log-book . . ."

The few twigs and the dried camels' dung which the crew of the Ford carried with them slowly died down with a gentle flame which lit up the sheet of paper.

"First day in the Upper Egyptian desert, 24. X. 1947. Distance covered in seven hours, 71 km; average speed per hour, 10.1 km. Lowest temperature 82°, highest 115°, maximum oil temperature 230°. By the map we have another three hundred kilometres to go to Wadi Halfa . . ."

The night breathed the heat of the desert gathered during the day, and far above our heads twinkled milliards of stars.

A procession of camels' skeletons

There is no hotel in the world to equal that of the desert.

You do not have to worry about looking for a garage, your neighbours do not bother you with banging doors, your eyes are not fatigued by the ceaseless flickering of neon lights from the advertisements on the house opposite — you do not even have to open the window to let out the stale air.

Spending the night in the desert, oh! that is something very different.

You can choose your resting place freely, the desert is yours. Here, there, no, still a few steps further on, where a soft drift of sand has piled up. Why should you bother to make your bed and plump up your pillows, when the *khamisin* has prepared it all for you? You lie down on your back, turn over on to your sides a couple of times, and there you are with a bed made to fit you which has no rival. You feel like caressing the soft velvet of the desert and the night, smoothing the rounded thighs of the dunes and sifting trickles of sand through your fingers, handful after handful, like through an hour-glass. Nowhere can you hear the rustle of grass or the whisper of trees, only the dome of the stars keeps a noble silence above your head, like dignity incarnate.

In the Nubian desert you need not fear putting on your shoes in the morning and finding a poisonous scorpion resting there; nor do snakes appear at your head. You do not even hear the dreaded hum of mosquitoes. Infinite silence spreads over the sandy plains. Silence and waterless death . . .

Towards morning the chilly air woke us up.

Our shirts were damp, and so were the sleeping bags we had taken refuge in some time after midnight. The thermometer lying on the sand registered fifty-three degrees, but in a few hours it would have risen to a hundred and thirteen.

At sunrise we set out on our journey again. For the remaining four fifths of the road to Wadi Halfa we had two days left, calculated according to our timetable. The desert was defiling past us again, *wadi* after *wadi* falling back. Instead of yellow sand we suddenly found under the wheels a brown plain covered thick with tiny round stones which looked as though they had just come out of a munitions factory. They are made by the sand storms which hurl them about the desert until they are absolutely smooth. A work of ant-like patience, a symbol of infinite space and infinite time.

The day before we had occasionally passed "signposts" which had probably been set up here during the war; they were mere heaps of stones gathered round about and made into a rough cairn; then nothing for dozens of kilometres. The wheels throw up showers of stone projectiles against the steel floor. The hand of the compass has settled at 198, as the map indicated.

"Slow down for a minute and look to the right. I'll hold the steering-wheel. It looks like a row of signposts. I wonder why they put up so many at once?"

"We must go round the Sin el Kaddab hills on the east side. The signposts would lead us to the west. We'd better take council again . . ."

We sounded our horn to tell the Ford to draw up, and got out the compass and the telescope. But the council of war was not needed.

"Those are camel skeletons," said the Bisharin, "there was no water."

We continued our journey in silence. Over and over again these sign-posts to death sprang up on the horizon and came to meet us. They rose out of the yellow and sank down into it again, whole giant skeletons with the skin stretched tight over them, preserved like parchment by the heat and dryness of the desert. Parchment signed with the implacable sentence of the desert; a yellowing roll several kilometres long...

One after another the *wadis* fell behind, getting rarer and rarer until they ceased altogether. The terrain got better with every kilometre until it was one endless, smooth, hard plain, from horizon to horizon, level and endless. Never had we felt such freedom at the wheel; ten kilometres to the right or to the left, everywhere the same ideally level ground, as if made for a motor race track. The sun-burned sand disappeared from view and instead we were flying as if on skis over a never-ending snowy plain.

After midday we stopped for an hour's rest, to have dinner and give the cars an overhaul. The engine is covered with a layer of sand and the filters are again half stopped-up; we tap the sand away with the steel handle of the jack, for there is not time to take them out and wash them in benzine again. We have no appetite for food, and so a few biscuits and a tin of fruit is all we lay on the sandy tablecloth of the desert. For a quarter of an hour we lay down to rest with our heads under the front of the car, the only place to give any relief. At the back of the car it was impossible, for the heat of the engine burned you from above and the heat of the sand from below, concentrating the heat of the sun since sunrise.

We set off again at 1.20; we had driven 118 kilometres since morning!

Far ahead the horizon rose and dark piles of rocks could be seen at the edge, perhaps five kilometres away, perhaps ten, we could not tell. In the desert you cannot guess distances. The rocks seemed to retreat before us; we had driven fifteen and then twenty kilometres and they were still there on the edge of the plain ahead of us, like an ever-escaping phantom. Finally we drove between them, after we had gone twenty-five kilometres. It was a fantastic country, like something in H. G. Wells: dead, wild, like on the moon. A moment later the *fata morgana* enchanted us with a faithful picture of the Rock of Gibraltar. The steep wall of the cliff face was reflected in a smooth lake; two or three hills rose to the left of Gibraltar, sheer out of the water. A minute or two later the Ford slid on to this silver sea before our eyes. It was a strange feeling. You hold your breath expecting cascades of water to fly from beneath the wheels, and waiting for the moment you can run and put your head under water. What you see before you is so clear, and yet it is not real. You stretch your hand out to feel the water and

at the same time your eyes automatically turn to the map, which brings you to your senses again.

The rounded cliffs come closer and closer on both sides. The valley between is getting narrower, winding among them, and the sand gets deeper. There are more frequent signs of dried-up water-courses. The soft sand brings you back to the reality of being in the desert and to the hard fact that there remains still a hundred and fifty odd kilometres to the nearest goal. The sand dunes drift right up to the cliff face and stretch across the path of the cars. The Ford sank in the sand again over the axles more than once. We were driving through a steep rocky valley still channelled by the streams of the rainy season. The hard sand had been driven by windstorms into deep waves. When we finally managed to get out of this dangerous valley the sun was already disappearing behind the dark rocks and another night was coming down over the desert.

Not far from our camping-ground a tall cliff dominated the country; perhaps only ten minutes' walk distant. Somewhere beyond it must be the Nile valley, along which the rest of our route lay. We set out and walked for a quarter of an hour, half an hour, an hour. In the east the clear crescent of the moon rose from behind bizarre cliffs, and bathed the desert in pale light. After walking for an hour and a half we reached the foot of the great rock. It took us twenty minutes to climb to the top, and by that time the landscape to the east was veiled in the silver breath of the evening mist. Perhaps somewhere beyond ran the green strip of life fed by the life-giving artery which victoriously carries its vital sap far to the north, to the Nile delta. It was late at night before we got back to camp, tired by our drive and by the walk . . .

At sunrise two dusty cars set off for the south east. The last round of the duel, a difficult, hard final round. The ground sloped into a valley. We had hard work to find passable gaps between the rocks and along the water-courses; the twisting rocky hillside forced us sharply to the left and back to the right; then the last of the cliffs retreated and opened up before us the view we had so long been waiting for. Deep in the valley we could see a narrow strip of water and two broken strips of green. Beyond the river another complex of rocky hills and sand dunes rose to the horizon.

For the first time in these three days we did not need to be so careful with our water. We had a ceremonial wash, and said goodbye to the soft silky dunes which rose some forty feet like the snowy brow of the mountains. Now, when at least in part we had no need to fear the soft, treacherous sand, the sharp outline of the highest of the dunes, running away into the distance, tempted us irresistibly. We were filled with childish delight at the

idea of rolling in this constantly changing element. We took a few steps up the side of the dune, and an avalanche of sliding sand poured down. We did not mind it getting in our hair, our shoes, the pockets of our shorts, everywhere — we couldn't resist slipping down with this soft flowing stream over and over again, head first, on our bellies. And once more we climbed up, cutting through the sharp sand of this mountain of millions of sparkling grains which delight the eye and start moving down in regular layers — and for the last time we threw ourselves headlong into the stream of molten gold to land up a few dozen yards below, at the foot of the yellow hill, where the three Egyptians were holding their sides with laughter. Perhaps their fellow-travellers had lost their reason — and only an hour before they had bent their heads so seriously over the glass case with the mysterious marks, and looked into the distance with those strange glasses!

We still had a few dozen kilometres of deep, dusty sand to drive through in the Nile valley. The wheels lost their grip, the engines roared, and we had to keep changing from first to second gear and back again to make any progress. We kept stopping to give the over-heated engines a few minutes to cool down. For the second time the Ford's radiator cap flew off under the pressure of the steam.

And then the first inhabitants of the Sudan came to greet us, smiling and surprised and full of hospitality. They had not seen a car since the war ended, and so we were naturally the centre of attention. People came running out of their mud cottages and a bunch of children accompanied us through the village until we finally drew up on the steep bank of the Nile.

Opposite, on the other side of the river, was Wadi Halfa . . .

"There's no ferry anywhere near," said the young Sudanese teacher in embarrassment, when we finally sought him out in the village. "You will have to cross over to the other side by boat and arrange with the administrator to send a steamer for you . . ."

We cast lots, as usual.

Mirek sat on a low stone wall by the Tatra, with his typewriter on his knee, to stand watch over the car, write down our first impressions, and write up all our observations. The children stood round him watching the black buttons jumping beneath his fingers, and gazing fixedly at the mysterious beaks which kept popping out and prodding the paper to one side. They jumped each time the bell rang, and then all at once burst into loud laughter. What a funny musical instrument! So many buttons, so much drumming, and only a stray ring now and again! Soon a competitor sat down beside him. A curly-headed lad put his primitive drum on his knee and the wooden sticks were soon leaping about on the tightly-stretched skin.

A semi-circle of gleaming teeth, and shining eyes. Instead of the metal cap of the typewriter the clear silvery laughter of happy children rang out in the thunder of taps . . .

An angular-looking boat with several decks and a flat keel well below the surface of the water was anchored silently on the other bank, dead and motionless. Its strange appearance was accentuated by the paddle wheels fixed at the back and covered by a broad drum. It was an old veteran which still remembered the first days of Anglo-Egyptian rule in the Sudan. The feast of Great Bairam was still on, and the boatmen were not working. George finally got taken across the river in a little sailing boat. Mutual surprise. He reported at the District Commissioner's Office and to the Egyptian liaison officer. In a few minutes dots and dashes went flying through the air and in an hour they would know in Shellal that we had arrived safely. Passports, the car's papers, our medical certificates, the Cairo Ministry of Health's confirmation that we had been inoculated against cholera, all had to be seen. Then there were negotiations in the dock manager's office.

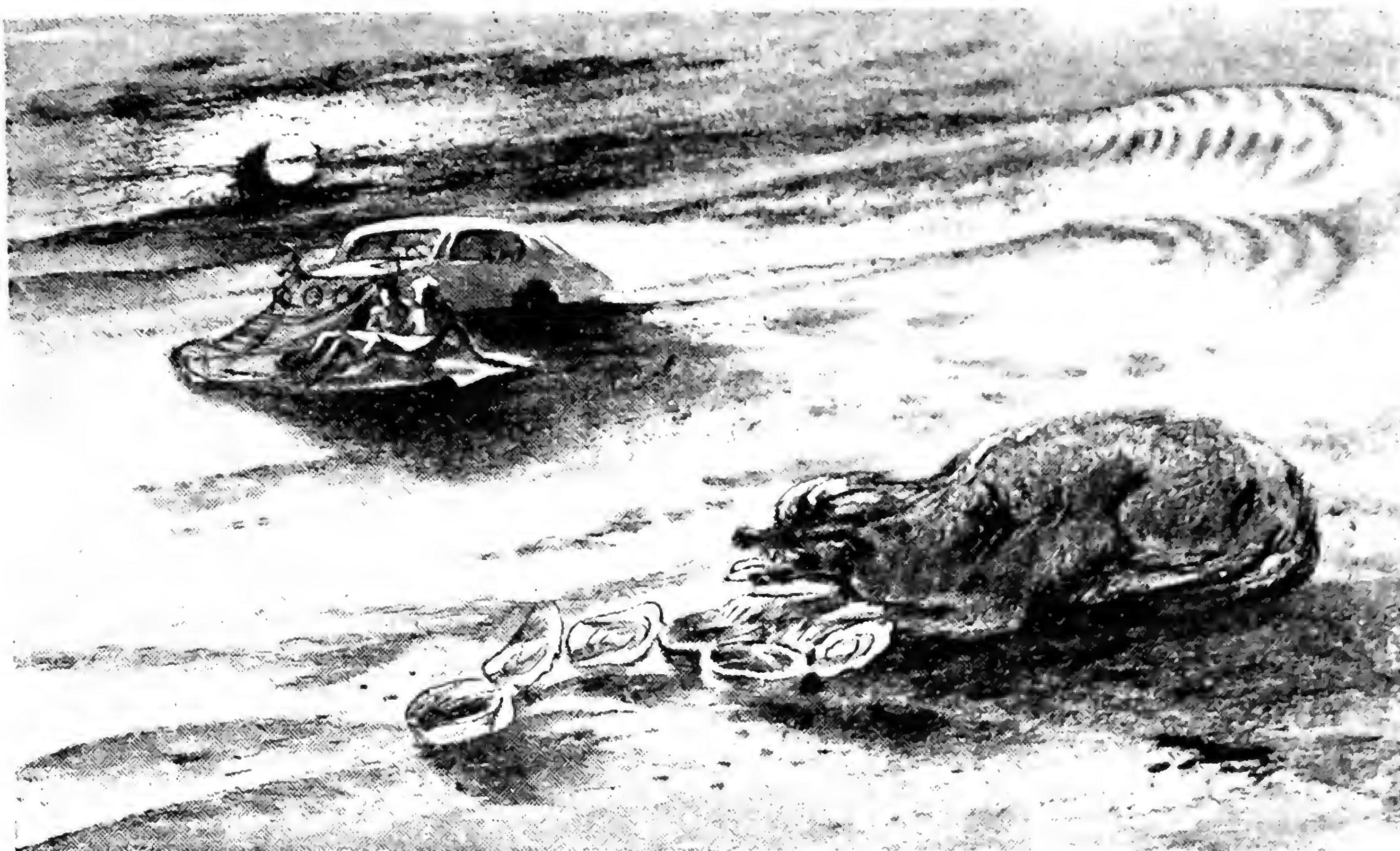
"We have no motorboats, you'll have to wait until we get hold of a stoker and some workmen, otherwise you won't get over to this side . . ."

Two hours later thick smoke was pouring from the river steamer's funnel and Sudanese workmen were fixing strong gangways to the ferry pontoon. It gave us a lot of trouble to drive down the steep slope of the Nile bank; the river level had sunk by several metres. We grew petrified with horror at the thought that the miserable rope held by some thirty pairs of muscular arms might break and our Tatra go rolling straight down into the Nile.

The river splashed gently against the sides of the pontoon and engulfed the last rays of the sun, slowly sinking in the west.

That evening they brought the bill for our crossing to the little Greek hotel Passiuras. It amounted to seven pounds thirty-five piastres. 1,470 crowns. And in the bill was the specification:

"1,250 kilogrammes of coal at 4.40 £	.	.	.	.	562 piastres.
30 workmen	.	.	.	.	173 piastres."



Chapter Sixteen

THE VACUUM HAS BEEN FILLED

In Wadi Halfa the situation was just as difficult as in Aswan.

The District Commissioner — the highest official of the administrative service in the northern region of the Sudan — looked at us inquiringly when we turned up in his office to ask for permission to carry on our journey to the south — and then categorically refused our request.

“When you were given your visas in Cairo the Sudan Agency certainly supplied you with the information booklet, from which you could have found out that travelling through the desert by car is not allowed as a matter of principle . . .”

“They did, but at the same time they promised to get us a permit as a special case, and said they would wire here to Wadi Halfa.”

“I have received no such information,” answered the District Commissioner shortly.

We went on to give him a long explanation, a repetition of what we had said in Aswan. “We want to travel right across Africa overland, from Cairo to Cape Town. In Aswan they gave us a guide who almost got lost

in the desert — we had to help him out with our compass and map. Our strongest point is that we do not need water for the car. We have no radiator.”

“How’s that, ‘got no radiator’? What do you mean?” the Commissioner raised his voice and wrinkled his brow.

“Our engine is air-cooled and . . .”

“. . . where is your bus?” he asked impatiently interrupting us.

“It’s standing outside. Would you like to have a look at it?”

The District Commissioner lost his official brevity and turned into a motoring fan.

“Hmmm! I’ve never seen anything like that before. Turbines! And is the cooling enough for the devilish heat of the desert?” he took a quick look round and lay on his belly to look at the Tatra from underneath.

“The maximum oil temperature was 110° C, that’s — half a minute — about 230° Fahrenheit. We had to wait for the Ford more than once, before the water in their radiator cooled down. The revolutions of our turbines are not dependent on the speed of the car; the engine gets plenty of air even if the car is just grubbing along in the sand.”

The Commissioner brushed his knees and turned to us with a nod.

“I’ll ring up Khartoum and see what can be done. It’s bad luck, Great Bairam is still on, but perhaps I can get hold of the commander at home.”

Five minutes later Khartoum was on the line. There followed explanations and sporting enthusiasm. “I recommend a favourable reply. I’ll expect a cable tomorrow.”

“Well, boys, now I can only keep my fingers crossed for you,” said the Commissioner in farewell. “I’ll ring you up at your hotel as soon as I get an answer.”

We were burning with impatience and excitement when we entered his office on October 28th. He greeted us with a smile and even before we sat down we knew we should be able to go.

“Have you got any information about the southern sector of the desert?”

“Colonel Le Blanc gave us his itinerary when we were in Cairo.”

The Commissioner looked through the papers on his desk.

“Here is the last itinerary issued by the government of Sudan, it may be of some use to you. Unfortunately I cannot give you any maps.”

Once again we signed a declaration that we were setting off at our own risk.

“Stick to the railway line as far as Abu Hamed and check from this itinerary which side of the desert is more passable. Beyond Abu Hamed is the worst stretch of country of your whole journey. I’ll send a despatch for

them to get a guide ready for you, he can go with you as far as Abidiya. Is there enough room in the car?"

"That's quite out of the question. The car is carrying a double load as it is, we've a ton of baggage including our reserves of water and petrol. There's no room for anybody inside the car."

"Then you'll have to go alone, but you must realise that you are risking your lives. You have to go far away from the Nile into the desert and there's not a single orientation point to be seen."

Reports were sent to two control stations by telegram, time limits were agreed, a firm handshake — and the road to the south was open. We could not have wished for a more fitting gift on our national holiday.

"Good luck to you — and I'd be glad to have news of you from Khartoum soon over the wires."

Ten nameless stations

The canvas water-bags we had filled the night before, to test, had not let out a single drop by morning. The question only remained where to fix them. From Aswan they had lain on the running-board of the Ford, held on by ropes.

"Nobody in Kopřivnice thought of that, when they made the first Tatra without a running board in 1946. There's no room for them inside, anyway, and we can't put them on the roof, either."

The only other possibility was the front bumper. But here there was the possibility that the constant bumping might puncture the bags either on the corners of the bumper or on the Auto Club pennants fixed on the bonnet. The choice was simple. We could not set out without water, and so the badges had to be taken off. We fixed the canvas bags, each holding ten gallons of water, on to the pennant holders and tied them on to the bonnet handle several times over, above the oil cooler ventilator. We gave everything a last overhaul and looked anxiously at the rear of the overloaded car, which was squatting dangerously near the ground . . .

We started a new page in our log-book: "speedometer 090, clock 6.40, height above sea level 878 feet, thermometer 82° F, tank and four reserve cans of petrol full, another eight gallons in sealed cans for safety. Sun above the horizon, spirits at their highest."

To give us a good send off there were fourteen kilometres of asphalt, as far as the Wadi Halfa aerodrome. The old trail leads on, but on the other side of barbed wire. It seems that the prohibition on driving further

is conscientiously adhered to. We carefully lifted this unusual obstacle and the Tatra slid into the desert again, this time on her own.

The first stretch of our journey from Wadi Halfa led near the railway line running south through Khartoum to Sennar, where it branched in two; the western line went on to El Obeid and the north-eastern line to Port Sudan on the Red Sea. Four hundred and sixty kilometres of the iron band of the railway line cuts across the wide curve of the Nile, broken by three giant cataracts. Along this line there are ten numbered stations, probably to give the crew of the train, the passengers and the engine a chance to rest. Nobody gets into the train at these stations lost hundreds of kilometres in the desert, nor has anybody any desire to leave the safety of the train . . .

We could tell early on in the morning that the whole sector was not going to offer anything very interesting. Softish sand with old tracks still to be seen, a gentle slope up towards the horizon, two narrow bands of iron rails. Kilometre after kilometre, dozens of kilometres on end. After driving thirty-three kilometres we came to the first station; it was a tiny building with an ebony-faced stationmaster and a group of curly-headed children. They look our unusual vehicle over curiously and wave goodbye as we drive on.

Bare hills start rising on either side, but the plain in front of us does not change; it keeps on rising gently. In the distance something moved in the sand, and then froze. As we came nearer we recognised one of the rare inhabitants of the desert — a small gazelle. These are incredibly shy beasts, but they are not afraid of cars. We were able to get within a few yards before the gazelle took a few tremendous leaps and disappeared from sight.

By nine o'clock we had reached the third station, almost 100 kilometres from Wadi Halfa. After travelling over excellent terrain for so long we came up against the first difficulties. A few cliffs jutted out right up to the station, with drifts of soft sand round them. We changed quickly to second and then back to first gear for the wheels not to lose their grip and to avoid having to take our usual remedy — the sand-channels, which always cost a great deal of effort and valuable time. There are no stones in the soft sand, so that we do not have to fear either for our springs or for the bottom of the transmission box. The sand got worse and worse, softer and softer, with shallow *wadis* occurring more and more often. They were only two or three decimetres deep and barely two metres across, but their edges were sharp; there was no difference in colour, and so our eyes tired by the bright sunlight noticed them only at the last minute. At the same time we had to keep increasing our speed so as not to get stuck. The heavy going was confirmed by the English itinerary the Commissioner had given us — the words

“heavy sand” became a reality every few yards. We only just managed to drive up to station No. 4 on the soft sand of the embankment.

The temperature of the air had risen to 104° F and the altimeter showed 1,722 feet above sea level.

An unexpected meeting in the desert

We were resting and having a bite to eat.

A cloud of smoke appeared on the horizon; as it grew nearer the noise of thunder grew louder and a quarter of an hour later the long snake of white wagons drew in to the station. Heads appeared at the windows and the first of the curious climbed out to get a better look at our Tatra. There were many questions and much to explain. Even the engine-driver left his machine.

“Wouldn’t you do better to fly, since you’ve got a *tayara*?” the stoker laughed at us. “I’d like to know where you’ve hidden the wings of your plane . . .”

“We’d often like to have wings to help us here in your desert, if we could . . .”

We secretly envy the engine-driver his two iron rails, leading him in safety across the desert from horizon to horizon. He does not have to bother about soft sand or about rocks, about deep *wadis* or overloaded springs. He has his timetable and when he leaves Khartoum he knows he will end up in Wadi Halfa. If his engine lets him down he gets another sent out to him.

We took two hurried photographs, the engine whistled, and off we all went — the train to the north and we to the south.

We had no idea at that moment that we should get news from Prague months later that this chance meeting had been a symbolical one, the meeting of two Czechoslovak products in the middle of the Nubian desert — Czechoslovak coaches and a Czechoslovak car. It would have sufficed to bend down and look at the axles of the coaches, where we could have read the same name *Tatra* which the train passengers admired on the front bonnet of our car. These coaches, delivered over twenty years ago to Egypt, are still running in the Sudan, tapping out their desperately monotonous rhythm in the equally desperate monotony of the yellow desert.

The road got worse and worse to the fifth station. We left the track and plunged far into the desert, where the terrain was firmer, but even there we got into a network of *wadis* and *khors*. There were dozens in every kilo-

metre, and beyond them more cliffs. We drove round them carefully at a walking pace. Then we returned to the plain, and encountered dried-up water-courses. Meanwhile on the other side of the railway line the groups of cliffs had grown into wild, rugged hills. Even so the day's journey was dreadfully dull. After the excitements of the previous days we could hardly believe the desert could be so monotonous. We began to feel tired from the sharp, blinding light, from the heat and from the constant effort of watching the ground ahead of the car. Our only comfort was the speedometer, which undeniably showed that we had travelled over a hundred and sixty kilometres since morning.

And suddenly on the horizon ahead of us we saw the three-cornered sails of the Nile *feluccas*. It was incredible, for the Nile was at least two hundred kilometres away! But our eyes confirmed that the sails were moving over the water, clearly and distinctly, more definite than in a mirage. The sails did not change, but grew larger as we came closer. Not until we got within a few hundred metres did red brick foundations grow up beneath the sails and the water disappeared, as if the sand had swallowed it up. We had arrived at the railway warehouses with their white conical roofs.

This was station No. 5.

We were nearly 2,275 feet above sea level; the burning air, 109.4°, quivered in the midday sun, but the engine was cooling properly. There was a sharp wind blowing in our faces, although the heat was like a furnace. The metal parts of the car burned to the touch, our lips were cracking and our nostrils felt as if they were on fire.

Two hours later we passed the auxiliary station, but they were two hours of hard work. *Khor* followed *khor*, there were parts where the small rocks were covered with sharp stones, and then more *wadis* lying across our path. Brakes, accelerator, brakes, accelerator — it was our only hope if we did not want to get stuck and have to dig ourselves out for hours.

"At least Le Blanc says in his itinerary that this is *pas mauvais* . . . I wonder what it's going to look like when it starts getting *mauvais*?"

"Perhaps he was driving along the other side of the railway line and forgot to say so. We'd better try it, too, as soon as the embankment gets lower." . . .

It was after three o'clock before we reached station No. 6, over two hundred kilometres from Wadi Halfa. It is the biggest station along the whole of the line to Abu Hamed, and the only one to be equipped with water tanks. We filled up our water-bags with the warm, turbid water. Beyond the station we found the first convenient place at which to cross the railway line to the eastern side. Before we had gone many hundred yards

we were anxiously looking for a place at which to cross back again, because the ground here was far worse. We only just managed to drive out of it at the last moment, leaving wheel-tracks a decimetre and a half deep behind us. Not until evening did we strike a well-worn trail, obviously made by military lorries with broad tyres, or by lorries when the track was last repaired. We drove over wide flats of sharp gravel which flew on all sides under the wheels and beat against the chassis. Even when the sun began to set the hot air from the desert burned as if from a furnace. Just before sunset we drove past station No. 7. It was time to look for a camping ground, but for security reasons we did not want to camp near the station, and so we spread our sleeping bags out in a sheltered rift between the cliffs, a few kilometres further on.

The red clouds had not yet died in the west when the ruddy disk of the moon appeared in the east. Not for an hour did it assume normal shape and colour. We had been looking forward to a well-earned night's rest, but we could not sleep. Even after sunset the thermometer indicated 100° F.

We did not even light a fire.

It was a clear night, with few stars shining high up in the sky. We switched on the radio and mechanically turned the dial to where we had regularly caught Prague when we listened in in North Africa. With every hundred kilometres to the south audibility diminished; we could only vaguely catch the evening news. We strained our ears to catch every word . . .

"And in conclusion here is the weather forecast issued by the State Meteorological Institute: temperature in Bohemia during the day, 21°; night temperature round freezing point . . ."

Our eyes slid to the indicator on our thermometer: 89°, and it was three hours after sunset . . .

Prague disappeared for good, and we twiddled the knob to find some station.

Suddenly the opening passage of Smetana's *Vltava*, with the flutes and strings, rang out clearly.

The sound flowed triumphantly into the quiet of the Nubian desert, thousands of kilometres away from the Silver Foamy Stream; gently, softly, like a mother's caress. The rafts slid silently over the ruffled surface of the water, an autumn breeze threw an armful of yellowing leaves into the depths, and then the *Vltava* swelled with the victorious chorale of Vyšehrad . . ."

An English announcer: Radio Jerusalem, the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. And then followed Dvorak's ninth Slavonic Dance.

The last round

It was already 79° before the sun rose!

We packed our sleeping bags and waited for day to break so as to set out immediately. We had another struggle with a dried-up watercourse, and then, hardly had we got out of a maze of deep *khors*, when we came into sand drifts where sharp rocks and stones stuck up, and long stretches of dry grass with hard lumps of sand caught in it. We could only make headway with difficulty, for both the sharp stones and the drifts prevented us from getting up any speed. The clock pointed almost to ten when a group of drooping trees and a few buildings rose out of the sand in front of us. This was our first goal — Abu Hamed.

People crowded round the car as we poured petrol from our reserve cans into the tank, and filled oil into the engine. The local sheik invited us to a cup of Arab tea, and we could not refuse his invitation. We gained valuable information from some of the Sudanese, and two of them tried to give us a primitive drawing of four large *wadis* which we would have to cross before we came to Abidiya. We emptied our tastefully decorated cups of thick Arab tea for the second time; out of curiosity we turned the saucers over and were surprised to read the words: *Made in the Soviet Union*. Russian china here in the Sudan, and our Arab hosts listening with interest to our conversation in Czech over the open map. We telephoned to Berber that we were passing through Abu Hamed, and after a rest of two hours we continued our journey.

Soon we left the marked track and turned into open country. The first obstacles cropped up after we had gone forty kilometres. Long ridges of sharp rock stuck up from the drifts of sand thrown up on the firm sandy ground by wind storms; they got more frequent on both sides of us, sticking up out of the smooth sand, as sharp as razors, and lining up one behind the other like toothed saws. They are the edges of the sloping rock formations beneath the sand, stretching in straight lines several metres long, and blown clear of sand by the wind. We drove over one saw after another, full of fears for our tyres. There was no means of avoiding them, and no possibility of going back. We got out of the car and set off, each in a different direction, to look for a more passable track. We felt as if we were in the Hall of Mirrors on Petřín Hill. To the left, to the right, one step forward, two steps back, until at last we found a way out along a dried-up water-course into open country again. The forty-fifth kilometre brought us to Jebel Hassari and in a little while we could set our direction by a definite orientation point — the rocky heights of Jebel Burg el Anag.

After driving for an hour we reached the foot of the hills.

They form the highest point for miles around — steep black cliffs, on the leeward side covered right to the top by dunes three hundred and twenty feet high. We could not resist taking our cameras and climbing up to the top. The soft sand gave way beneath our feet, we kept sinking in and sliding down; we made for the bare edge of the rocks and thus managed to get to the top. The gaps between the peaks widened and the curtain of rocks fell away. What an expanse of beauty lay at our feet all at once!

To the west the velvet soft lines of the dunes bore away, with little cliffs and ridges between them, and far beyond them a narrow strip of green with the mirror of the Nile gleaming in its centre. It was an enchanting symphony of colour and form. This was no longer the dead desert. Fine lacy waves were wreathed round the brows of the dunes, and the light and shade playing over them changed their form and expression every minute.

Far below us lay a tiny silver beetle in the desert — our Tatra. And once more we felt the sensation which can come to you only in the infinite loneliness of the desert, hard and hostile to all intruders from the other world.

The tracks which every now and again appeared to confirm that we were going in the right direction disappeared for good beneath a firm layer of drifted sand when we got beyond the Anag hills. We drove ten or twenty kilometres over ideal ground, without a single orientation point to be seen. Then the terrain changed to a sea of gravel getting rougher and rougher; the level terrain began to break, the rocky ridges grew higher and higher, and the stones changed into rocks. Beyond each dune lay a *khôr*. We climbed the highest of the hillocks to look around, but as far as the eye could see there was nothing else in any direction.

This could not be the right way.

Losing our way with two bottles of tea

The right direction was probably somewhere further to the east, deeper in the desert, but if we were wrong we might get too far away from the Nile, into country from which we might not be able to get out at all with the car. And then even the possibility of going on foot for water might be lost. We struggled through the rocks metre by metre. Before sunset we climbed the highest hillock to get our bearings for the last time. Far away to the west gleamed a narrow strip of vegetation and to the south, perhaps thirty kilometres away, perhaps sixty, the Nile was shining in a bend round

which the track to Abidiya probably lay. We made a rough triangular sketch and in the falling twilight decided on the rough direction for the next day: 155. Closer to the Nile there was a caravan trail which led past the cliffs on the shores; if necessary we could go to the river to refill our supplies of water and get a better idea of our route. For the time being we were approximately at 18°50' N.

Early in the morning we checked up on our water supplies and decided on a small ration daily. There was no trouble about food, because in the burning sun we couldn't bear the thought of tinned meat. Then we set off again to try out the difficult terrain. Sometimes it looked as if the Tatra would stay put for good, and sometimes we expected her to break to pieces on the rocks. We prepared the ground a bit, cut our way through shrubs and sand in dried-up water-courses, wound in and out among rocks and sand dunes, losing our bearings more and more and only instinctively trying all the time to get nearer to the waters of the Nile in the west.

Once when we stopped to rest we saw with horror that a trickle of water appeared beneath one of the collapsed water-bags. Our last drop of water was draining away into the sand. With the constant bumping the bag had been rubbing against the uneven edge of the hole they had drilled in the bonnet in Cairo to stick the club badges on. We hastily emptied the remaining water into a bottle and boiled it. The check-up revealed the depressing fact that we had only two tins of fruit juice and not quite four pints of tea left. And how long would that have to last us?

In the deep sandy depressions it was no longer any use putting sand-channels under the car; every time she sank we had to dig her out at great cost. The narrow foot of the jack sank deep into the sand at every revolution, and only empty petrol cans were of any use. About four o'clock we came to a broad water-course with tall dried-up shrubs, on one of which we got thoroughly stuck. For half an hour we moved hundred-weights of sand away from beneath the wheels of the car. Our eyes were aching, throats and lips burning as if on fire, and our tongues cleaving to the roofs of our mouths.

Finally we managed to get the car on to the sand-channels, and lay down beside her, weak and feeble, to get some strength back. Our heads were swimming from exhaustion, but the very thought of food made us retch. We drove off, but the same minute we stuck in the sand again. We were working mechanically, without thinking, until the growing darkness forced us to turn the engine off. The whole day, from sunrise to sunset, we had driven only 73 kilometres. Nevertheless the Tatra had put up its greatest performance since the start of our journey.

We lay down in the sand by the car, exhausted, with swollen hands

from constantly having to dig the car out of the sand. For the first time in our lives we felt our mouths quite dry and our tongues sticking to the roof. We divided the last two bottles of tea . . .

Before our eyes passed a succession of rocky gullies, sandy *wadis*, the tracks of the car seemed to criss-cross in the starry sky and come back down to the horizon, where a ruddy glow was slowly appearing. It hurt to think. It almost burned, as if your brain was seared by the reflection from the red disk of the moon which had jumped up over the horizon and was slowly climbing through the sparks struck from the stars. It was quiet — a heavy, tangible, physically painful quiet.

What would tomorrow bring? And the day after? Would *askaris* on camels turn up? Or would a plane appear above our heads? Would one of the bearings in the engine drop out, or would the overburdened springs of the car break? Or would the outer tyres be cut in shreds by the gradually worsening terrain, leaving us helpless in the middle of the desert? What help would it be to us, in the end, that we need not sacrifice the last drops of water to the radiator, as any other motorist would have to do with a normal car . . . ?

At that moment a breath of wind brought to our ears the distant, faint howl of a dog.

No, it must be a hallucination. A phantom of our overstrained nerves. Then again we heard it, this time more clearly. Was it not the braying of a donkey? Sudden a long whistle cut across the dead quiet.

We both leaped to our feet together. In the distance the regular puffing of a railway engine could be heard; the rattle of iron wheels grew nearer until a quarter of an hour later the train thundered past somewhere behind a near-by hill. Somewhere over there must lie the Nile valley — we could not be far from the right trail!

The sky suddenly became clearer, the stars high up in the sky twinkled and seemed to shine more brightly.

We drank the last drop of tea.

In the morning we set out again refreshed, and after an hour's journey came to the railway line. Full of excitement we dashed out of the car to read the name of the station on the other side of the line.

Gananita.

"Where's the map?"

"We're twenty kilometres from Abidiya!"

From Abidiya, which we should have approached directly from the desert . . .

Supper with the jackals

We followed the railway line once more, keeping three or four kilometres away. We crossed the high embankment of an old deserted line, and on the other side we found a clear trail. And then we saw the first camels, the first people, the first cart — the evangelists of life in the Sudan. We felt like thanking them, somehow, for appearing in the desert like a symbol of rebirth.

We drove through villages which got bigger and bigger and stopped in front of the Post Office in the largest of them, Berber. Abidiya, which had been for days the goal of our longing, we had passed through without noticing it. From Berber we sent the obligatory report to Wadi Halfa and to Khartoum by telephone and telegram, and went on our way without stopping.

The tracks in front of us grew wider and wider — five, ten, even twenty paths side by side, each better than its neighbour. They ran apart and joined again like railway lines at a junction. Each driver apparently makes his own road, and when it is no longer to his liking he makes himself another. It is enough to drive once or twice over your own tracks, and the road is ready.

At 9.20 we arrived at Atbara, the main railway junction between Wadi Halfa and Khartoum. From here one line leads to the east to the Red Sea, to the only port in Sudan — Port Sudan. Atbara was the first little town we had seen for a long time. The broad asphalt streets were sheltered all day by the cool shade of avenues of old trees. Most of the houses and offices were hidden within green gardens. The railway repair sheds of the Sudanese State Railway willingly offered their help when we were looking for somewhere to change the oil and carry out a general overhaul of the car. The officials were helpful in carrying out the formalities of reporting on our journey and the plans for the last stretch. The Tatra was the centre of well-earned interest; before the war only a few military expeditions had passed this way with specially equipped vehicles, and during the war only strong convoys came through, until the Allied Command decided to stop all attempts. Our car was the first motor-car to come through the desert alone and without a guide.

We had barely an hour's time in which to change once more into the guise of civilised Europeans. Dirty, with a few days' growth of beard, exhausted and thirsty, we were grateful for the hospitality of the public rest-house. We put an end to the rationing of water — there was so much here, in all the taps, in the bath, in the shower! Crystal-clear, warm and cold. We had a good wash, bath, shower and shave, and drank our fill. Another stretch

during the afternoon, and by the next day perhaps we should have completed the seemingly endless desert sector of our journey . . .

We were slowly ferried across the river Atbara. The Sudanese ferrymen looked our Tatra over curiously, took council together, and then came laughing to ask us to show the *tayara* could swim in the water. If we'd got an amphibious vehicle, we could do without their help . . .

Beyond the Atbara we felt great physical relief to find the car running smoothly, without strain or danger again. The whole of its mechanism was resting with us; the excessive weight carried had disappeared — we had only a few quarts of water with us, and the contents of both cans and the sealed tins had almost entirely gone into the petrol tank. The damp air cooled the engine better than the dry air of the previous days, even if the temperature was the same. We passed numerous villages, flocks and herds, fields of maize and sugarcane. The only thing that worried us was the number of tracks and well-worn trails we met. Two days before a single one would have sufficed us; now we did not know which to choose. One of them led us to the Nile shortly before twilight, but there it ended suddenly. We surprised a group of Sudanese resting under leafy trees by the river — a real evening idyll. A handful of Negroes were preparing to have supper by the camp fire while the rest finished off their evening toilet in the river. The water rippled softly beneath the leafy trees and an old Negro mingled his voice with the trembling song of the cicadas. We felt almost ashamed to have broken the enchantment of this quiet evening scene.

The engine grew silent before six that evening. We found a suitable camping ground and fixed our mosquito-nets to the flag-sticks; near the river there were clouds of mosquitoes which hummed round our ears in a disagreeable fashion and stung like mad.

We were half-asleep when a slight rustle woke us. We reached for our pistols, which we had laid ready by our sleeping bags the evening before.

"Did you hear it?"

"I can still hear it . . ."

A dry crunching noise came from the place where we had thrown away our empty meat tins after supper; it grew quiet and then started again. In the clear moonlight we could see two dark bodies. Were they dogs? They didn't look like it, they had such bushy tails. Then the animals came fearlessly towards tins lying nearer. At last our unusual night visitors were clearly visible.

Two hungry jackals had come to share the remains of our supper.

A Czechoslovak car — the first and only one

The remainder of our journey to Khartoum ran through animated country. We passed through palm groves, farmed fields, rich vegetation which often reached out into the narrow path and wiped the traces of sand from the sides of the car. From time to time it took a bit of the paint off, too, but there was no way of preventing the loss of such "trophies". We found it equally difficult to resist the hospitable sheiks in the villages we passed through. They did not want to hear of our unnecessary desire to hurry on . . .

In Shendi we reported to the District Commissioner. We sat in his office trying to understand the meaning of what we had seen in the small entrance-hall. A Sudanese in torn linen trousers sat by the wall, holding in his hand a rope which passed through a little hole into the next room. He pulled and slackened, pulled and slackened, over and over again, like a human automat. Not until we entered the Commissioner's office did we see the other half of the picture. A large bamboo frame with canvas stretched over it hung from the ceiling, attached to the rope from the next room. The Commissioner sat at his desk and the papers lying in piles in front of him rose and fell slightly beneath the stone paperweights every time the frame moved. A human ventilator. On the desk stood an electric lamp. At that moment we realised that we could not have found a more eloquent proof of the snobbish superiority of the colonial administrators towards the despised niggers. A handful of maize and black beans for this human machine was after all cheaper than buying a cheap mechanical ventilator which would only take a few drops of petrol from the old Diesel engine . . .

Beyond Shendi the road was much worse than we had expected from the map and the nearness of the capital city of the country. At times we drove through sand again, and then across dozens of narrow dried-up water-courses. The steep ten-foot banks were a serious obstacle; some of them we had to drive down a centimetre at a time. It was an unpleasant feeling, first standing on the brake-pedal and the clutch, and then suddenly lying back against the seat with the bonnet sticking right up into the air in front of the wind-screen. In some of the *khors* the slope was so steep that the front bumper landed right on the ground. The number plate soon bore signs of having dug itself into the ground; the steel plate was bent over the edge of the bumper. Just before dark we eventually got on to a better trail, undulating but safe. While it was still light we caught sight of the romantic spurs of wild Jebel Suleik, and then the headlights picked up nothing more than the strip of dusty trail in front of us.

Two hours after sunset the lights of Khartoum sprang up in the distance,

and in another half hour we felt the purr of asphalt beneath the wheels and we passed beneath broad leafy trees. Khartoum, the capital of a land as yet unknown. We drove along avenues and broad modern streets until we reached the bank of the Nile and stopped before the Grand Hotel. We felt as if it was all a dream. We could not believe it was all over — all the dangers, the burning sun, the fears for the car, the sand, the treacherous terrain, the thirst, the uncertainty, and the hundreds of kilometres we had travelled. But there was no time for meditation . . .

A crowd of people surrounded us at once, and the newspapermen who had been told of our expected arrival greeted us with warm smiles and firm handshakes. People climbed into the car in their curiosity, and crawled under the front bonnet looking in vain for the radiator and the condensers. A car without water and the "Great Northern Desert"! The first car to drive from Aswan to Khartoum since the war, and the very first car to do the journey from Cairo to the point where the Blue Nile meets the White, alone and unaided. *A Czechoslovak car!*

The African vacuum between north and south had been filled in.

It was not surprising that the reporters asked questions about our tyres as well, for after all, they were equally to be thanked for the fact that the newspapers were able to print an interview with us about our successful journey through the desert, instead of a short paragraph announcing the death of two men in the desert, who died of thirst after losing their way.

Not until next day did we discover when looking over the car that in several places the sharp rocks of slate had cut through the outer covering of the tyres like knives. Nowhere had the cuts gone as deep as the inner tube.

"How did you look after your tyres?" was the unexpected question put by the reporters.

"We didn't do anything," was our reply, followed by explanations.

The only special care we were able to give the tyres was to take the wheel panels out so that the area round the back wheels got as much air as possible and the tyres were heated as little as possible in the high temperatures. The second measure we took where we drove through deep sand was to let a certain quantity of air out so that the tyres settled on a broader base and sank into the sand less. Most of the way, however, we could not adopt this precaution for fear of the tyres being cut through by the sharp stones we had to drive over regardless of the car and the wheels, to get out of difficulties at all. In the great and almost unbearable heat and with our time-limit for getting to Khartoum, we were not able to let out air when approaching a sandy stretch and pump it back again with a hand pump when we got on to stony ground again.

“What were the temperatures like?”

We reached for our log-book, where we had made careful notes of the whole journey, which including the two days we waited in Wadi Halfa had taken ten days in all.

“The first day 115° F in the shade, the second day 102°, the third 106°, the following seven days 107°, 107°, 104°, 115°, 109°, 115°, 111°...”

We did not need to tell these Sudanese reporters the distances. They knew them only too well.

The distance from Luxor in Egypt to the capital of the Sudan is 1,646 kilometres. Of this 957 kilometres is covered by the route from Aswan to Gananita where the motorist, if he succeeds in getting permission from the Egyptian and the Sudanese government to undertake the journey at his own risk, has no choice but to drive by the compass, compare scrappy sketch-maps with the orientation points, struggle against difficult terrain and against thirst — and hope that everything will work out all right...





Chapter Seventeen

SUDAN AT THE CROSSROADS

If you travel to the Sudan overland from the north, you do not even realise at which moment you cross the frontiers of this vast land, a quarter the area of Europe. Almost the whole of the frontier is formed by the imaginary line of the twenty-second parallel, and the desert on either side of it is exactly the same. The frontier guard posts and the customs offices are over three hundred kilometres apart. And yet the moment you arrive in Wadi Halfa you feel you are in quite another country. You still have ringing in your ears the propaganda slogans of Egyptian statesmen who have been asking in international circles for the two lands of the Nile valley to be officially joined under the Egyptian crown.

On the banks of the Nile, opposite Wadi Halfa, we caught sight of the first Arab houses. Here the material used for building is clay, just as it is in Egypt. But here, in the Sudan, you will not see dilapidated hovels and ragged dirty children, who hold out their hands to you for *baksheesh*, even if you are divided from them by the five metre wide irrigation canal. Here the houses are clean, surrounded by high walls of clay, and decorated with china

and majolica plates arranged above the doors and the narrow windows, reminiscent of the slits in a bee-hive. The children are healthy, clean and smiling. You will not see them drinking the water of the Nile, as they do throughout Egypt. They address you in their schoolroom English and immediately want to know why your car has got its engine at the back . . .

The road from Abidiya, where the desert trail joins the railway line and the course of the Nile, is lined with a never-ending row of Arab cottages. From time to time you can tell from the map that the villages bear different names, but there is no difference between them and you cannot tell where one ends and the other begins. The thick network of irrigation canals, conduits and channels, from which the Egyptian *fellah* gets water for his little fields, is missing here.

In northern Sudan the population is concentrated on a narrow strip of land along the course of the Nile, because they are not free to use the waters of the Nile as they wish. For every yard of irrigation channels and for pumping every gallon of water the permission of the Sudanese government must be sought, and the government is bound by an international agreement with Egypt.

Egypt is dependent on the Nile. This is the main argument they bring forward to support their demand that the Sudan should be put under Egyptian control in spite of the fact that the Nile does not rise in the Sudan. In the agreement on the waters of the Nile the river was divided into fifty-five sectors, of which only five were granted to the Sudan, on whose territory the White and the Blue Nile meet.

We saw for ourselves the paradoxical consequences of this way of managing the water of the Nile, in Khartoum, where gardens are watered with expensive drinking water, which costs money and has to be pumped up at considerable labour. And all because the water of the Nile, which runs at the foot of the gardens, is rationed.

The state treasury open to inspection

Sudan can boast of a rare phenomenon of which the Minister of Finance in any capitalist country would be rightly proud. Since 1912 the state budget has not known what it is to have a deficit. From 1929 to 1933, when the whole of the capitalist world was overcome by the economic crisis, Sudan had to relax a little of its tradition, by which the surplus state funds were placed in a reserve fund. The state budget during those years showed revenue exactly balanced with expenses. Not even then did they have a deficit.

There is no income tax in the ordinary sense of the word, in this country. This and the general state of public finances is something of which only government officials, representatives of the Sudan Information Service, and sometimes the inhabitants of the northern Mohammedan regions speak with satisfaction.

The state revenue in the Sudan is drawn mainly from direct taxes, i. e. from the tax on date palms, on cottages, and the poll tax. By our standards the rates are very low; the owner of a date palm pays less than five-pence a year. But just these five pence are a symbol of the unjust tax system in the country. In the northern regions, round Khartoum and Omdurman, for the majority of the Mohammedan Sudanese they mean very little. But for the Negroes of the southern regions, isolated from the rest of the world and its markets, they mean their whole wealth. And therefore the tax burden in the Sudan lies most heavily on the shoulders of the poorest class, the Negroes of the south.

For the first time you see before you the unjust criterion applied so generously by the government of the Sudan to the Arab north and so unkindly to the Negro south.

Sudan is a land of unutilised resources. The vast territory to the east of Khartoum, between the Nile and the frontiers of Eritrea, is remarkably fertile. The odd fields of durra are a proof of it, for they grow for months without rain, living on the supplies of water laid in by the soil during the rainy season. We thought of the hundreds of artesian wells in the Libyan desert, which have created artificial oases in the barren desert. In the Sudan there is no trace of anything like that. In the environs of Port Sudan there are gold fields which are not being exploited. It is said that oil wells and coal deposits have been discovered in the southern regions, but the government has not yet taken any steps to exploit them.

A few years ago the building of an extensive irrigation system was considered; it was to have cost about three quarters of a million pounds. A public loan would have realised barely 200,000 pounds. In the end the project was dropped, although the reserve fund, formed by the surplus funds of the state, showed a balance of eleven million pounds.

Once more you have before you an apparently incomprehensible phenomenon in the political life of the Sudan.

A glance at the map of Africa will give you the clue, and the history of the last five years of the nineteenth century will tell the rest.

Today the Sudan is the most sensitive link in the chain of territories stretching from the north to the south of Africa and ruled by the British. It was also a critical spot at the end of the last century.

It was then already a typical field for unscrupulous expansion on the part of both British and French imperialism in Africa. It was a territory which tempted them both from a military and an economic point of view — a rook on the chessboard of colonial strategy. It never occurred to them to remember that they were on a foreign continent, in a foreign country, a country where millions of people lived. They took no regard for the fact that they were robbing those people of their homes, ruining their lives, and taking away the independence and the wealth of their country.

In the Sudan two empires on the march clashed. The French sent Marchand from the Atlantic to fight his way through to the Nile and push the eastern frontiers of the French colonies between the seventh and fourteenth parallel north of the equator over to the Nile's left bank. The ruler of Abyssinia, Menelik, strengthened by his victory over the Italians at Adowa, was to entrench himself on the right bank. In this way the French wanted to govern a complete line of territory right across Africa from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, across the Nile, across Abyssinia which was under their influence, and across their territory in Somaliland. This would have meant dividing Africa by a line of subjugated territories from the west coast to the east.

The representative of greedy British imperialism in Africa, Cecil Rhodes, placed his line of "interests" at right angles to the French, however: from the north to the south, from Alexandria to Cape Town. Lord Kitchener advanced against Marchand. Sparks flew at Fashoda, but the French grew tired.

They retreated.

Only the fanatical resistance of the dervishes threatened the British, and that too was broken.

But the British are well aware that they will be able to rule the Sudan only so long as the population remains economically and therefore politically weak. The south can be exploited without investment. It is enough to buy up the agricultural products of the Negro peasants through the agency of a company whose complete monopoly is guaranteed by the colonial government.

The importance of the northern region of the Sudan is primarily strategical. Great Britain does not look either for gold or for cheap labour from it. The calm passivity of northern Sudan is far more valuable. Half a century ago Great Britain showed her strength here, and brought the country to her knees. Now she occasionally caresses her, protects her from disease, and even provides little pleasures such as no other vassal is granted. She has given her model schools, and recognises the son of the dervish leader, the Mahdi, as

the head of one of the two political parties — but she does not let the real power out of her hands. And she will never allow the Sudanese, not even a narrow class of rich merchants and religious leaders, to become too strong economically.

In return for everything she only requires that the northern part of the country should remain internally weak and be obedient. England has had to retreat from almost the whole of Egypt, and is hanging on tooth and nail to the Suez and Cyrenaica. But the Sudan, northern Sudan, is the keystone in the arch of the British colonies in Africa. That could never be replaced. And therefore Great Britain takes great care of its most sensitive points, Khartoum and Omdurman, looks after its health, gives many of the Sudanese the feeling of liberty and relieves them of the burden of taxes at the expense of the south.

Of course Great Britain does not want to give the feeling of power to those who still have vivid memories of the bloody clashes between the militant dervishes and the present lords of the land. Some of the Sudanese still living took part in those terrible battles, and their bodies still bear the marks of British shrapnel. They gave in before the enemy's superior strength, and the British do not want to let them get their lost self-assurance back again. And that is why they are not interested in furthering economic and technical progress here.

One of the main products of the country — apart from sesame seeds, cotton, durra and the famous gum arabic — is a special breed of maize with small golden grains. The whole life of the northern region of the Sudan depends on the harvest of this maize. In dry years, when the harvest is poor, the land is threatened with famine. At such times the government of Sudan has the chance to kill two birds with one stone. By limiting speculation they encourage confidence and quiet in the land, as well as preventing the small traders from getting too rich. They simply make a store of about 50,000 tons of maize, which anybody is free to inspect at any time, and into which they invest a large proportion of the state revenue.

If you go into the northern suburbs of Khartoum you see something which reminds you of the slagheaps of Ostrava and Vitkovice. Under the open sky, behind barbed wire, enormous pyramids of maize rise to the sky, heaped on concrete floors with drainage grooves. The flock of pigeons which circles over this state treasury from time to time is a good sign for the Sudanese who do not want to go to the trouble of going to see for themselves that there is no threat of famine.

The Sudanese soldier who was standing on guard at the open gates greeted us with a broad smile, put his rifle down on the ground and

willingly went to stand by the pyramid of maize for us to take a photograph of this local rarity. You involuntarily call to mind the ingenious signalling systems and the underground safes where the state puts its treasures in other lands. As we went back the soldier ran quickly past us to get time to pick up his rifle and stand at attention for a few seconds to salute us as we went through the gates.

The pigeons came down again to the pyramid of maize.

Umma versus Ashigga

When in the summer months of 1947 the United Nations Organisation in Lake Success decided to refuse Egypt's demand for the Sudan to be united to her, the independent party in Sudan, *Umma*, celebrated it as a victory, even if the results of the voting in Lake Success were far from the party's own programme.

Today the Sudan is divided into two camps, whose boundaries roughly correspond to the natural geographical and economic division of the country. The north is quite distinct from the south. Even here the Egyptian claim that the Sudan is inhabited by tribes related to the Egyptians is far from the truth. It is hardly true of the north, which has most in common with the Mohammedan world, but which has gradually mingled with the Negro population which is quite different in character, religion, colour, language and customs.

The exclusive domain of this second part of the population is the whole of the south right to the frontiers of Kenya, Uganda, Belgian Congo and French Equatorial Africa. The Sudanese of the south still live in tribes, leading often the primitive life of hunters, shepherds and tillers of the soil, naked or half-naked. They know nothing of the problems of the government in Khartoum. They act entirely in accordance with British interests.

The black, southern inhabitants of the Sudan also play little part in the fight between the main political rivals in the north, the *Umma* and *Ashigga* parties. Most of the people of the south have no idea of what the world around them is like; they can neither read nor write and are entirely under the influence of the elders and chiefs of their tribes. The latter are of course influenced by the British, with whose help they increase their authority in the eyes of their tribe, calling upon them to take decisions in quarrels and conflicts between neighbours; they are corrupt and easily won by the award of imaginary titles and functions.

Those favourable to Egypt are gathered in the *Ashigga* party, which has

also another, English name: the National Front. Head of the party is the religious leader, the "descendant of the Prophet", Es Sayid Ali Mirgani Pasha. The party's programme is one of autonomy, independent of Britain but beneath the auspices of the King of Egypt. The majority of the leading members of the party are merchants who hope that unity with Egypt would lead to the economic development of the country and to their personal gain.

The second strong fraction within the leadership of the Ashigga party, just as in the rival Umma party, is formed by the religious leaders, who use the influence of the Koran on the Mohammedan people of northern Sudan for their own political ends.

The Ashigga party is publicly supported by Egypt. At religious festivals the party distributes food, drink, clothing and the smaller necessities of life to those taking part — a method which in no way differs from the Egyptian election campaigns. The government deliberately retards the opening of further Egyptian schools out of fear that they will become new centres of the growing influence of Egypt. But this is not the only reason.

There is another side to the work of the Ashigga party; it is good and progressive; it is a thorn in the flesh of the British, but is reflected in the cultural progress of the country. Members of the party spend their spare time going round the country districts teaching the people to read and write, free of charge. Perhaps so that they will one day be able to read the Arabic newspapers from Egypt and the party's propaganda booklets . . .

We talked to one young village school-teacher who declared that he did not belong to either party. We were interested in his view of the Egyptian influence in the country. He was silent for a moment, and then formulated in perfect English an answer which surprised us.

"You know, you cannot be surprised if the Arab-speaking part of our population casts longing glances towards Egypt. All the literature written in Arabic and most of the newspapers they get hold of are published in Egypt. All the intellectuals who hold important posts in our country were educated in Egypt. We still have no university and so Sudanese youths have to go to Cairo to study . . ."

There is still another way in which the Ashigga party exerts an influence on the people of the Sudan, not the influence of the party as a whole, but of the most progressive and most worth-while elements. The main line of the party is one of uniting the Sudan with Egypt, but some members of the party who have studied in Egypt have brought back with them opposition to the feudal regime of Egypt and the Sudan. They have brought back new information about the great progressive movement throughout the world, and its growing influence in Egypt.

It is primarily these people who teach the illiterate Sudanese to read and write, but in addition they give them some knowledge of the world, of the colonial problem which touches the Sudan so closely, of the struggle of the nations of the world for economic and political independence. These progressive individuals do not follow the main line of the Ashigga party, but they have a tremendously important role to play in the Sudan.

An uncrowned king

The second party, which is roughly as strong as the first, has as its goal the complete independence of the country. The Umma party wrote the slogan "Sudan for the Sudanese" on its badge in a country where colonial rule is really only fifty years old. We talked to some of the representatives of this independent party.

The Sudanese, speaking in English, weighed every word of their answers carefully.

"We try to find a peaceful way of securing our demands in the international forum. At all costs we wish to avoid a repetition of the story of the end of the last century."

This answer was clear enough for us to realise at once that the British have nothing to fear from this party. There are other influential leaders in the Umma party who declare a more radical programme: independence at all costs; if not by peaceable internal means, then by pressure from outside, international arbitration, or revolution. But they do not mean revolution in the full sense of the word. The members of the Umma party are quite innocent of any intention to introduce a socialist regime in their independent Sudan. They are primarily concerned to get into their own hands the economic and political power of the British and Egyptians — into the hands of a small number of powerful party leaders. This might lead to a speedier development of the Arab-speaking northern region of Sudan, but the black south would remain at its present miserable level. Only the rulers and despotic exploiters would have changed.

The main representative of the Umma party, whose influence is strongest in the western and southern parts of northern Sudan, is the son of the "divine leader" of the fanatical dervishes, the Mahdi. Sixty-two-year-old Es Sayid Abd er Rahman el Mahdi Pasha is really the uncrowned king of Sudan, even if his followers amount to less than half of those taking an active part in political life.

He received us with ostentatious ceremonial, in his palace in Khartoum.

Abd er Rahman el Mahdi had just finished a consultation with the leading members of the Umma party in the palace garden when we were ushered into the reception room after being announced. His son received us. Thirty-year-old Es Sayid Siddik el Mahdi had returned shortly before from the United States, where as the unofficial representative of the Sudan he had taken part in the meetings of the United Nations Organisation which discussed the affairs of his country.

He declared that on the whole he was satisfied with the course of the discussions, for the rejection of the Egyptian demands was an indirect success for the Umma party.

"I had the impression that we have a great deal of sympathy on our side," Sayid Siddik finished hurriedly and stood up ceremonially, for his father had entered — Abd er Rahman el Mahdi. We were introduced. Then the son translated: "His Excellency proffers you a sincere welcome to his home."

Abd er Rahman el Mahdi, tall and grey-bearded, was dressed in a snow-white robe with long full sleeves and a sash of green silk round his waist; a serious, self-assured, intelligent man. He followed carefully every word of the questions we put in English and after they had been translated answered in pure classical Arabic. His appearance reminded us every now and again of a personification of Socrates.

We were surprised by his interest in Czechoslovakia. He knew and condemned the story of Munich and asked us about the German occupation during the war, the reconstruction of Czechoslovak industry and how we had done away with the damage caused by the war. From the part played by Czechoslovakia in the fight against Nazism and Fascism he passed on to discuss the problems of his own country.

"A short time ago the whole of the cultured world was fighting for democracy, equality, freedom and independence. I want my country too to enjoy the results of this struggle, the greatest in the history of mankind," said Abd er Rahman el Mahdi in conclusion.

He spoke of conceptions which during the war and when the war ended were so often quoted in the press of the western countries. But both the Mahdi and the other leaders of the Umma party accept both the words and the conceptions according to that example. They want to achieve independence for their country. They want to achieve economic co-operation with the highly developed industrial states of the progressive world, who would send them machines without colonial strategists in attendance. They want to achieve the economic development of the Sudan. But they are really only concerned with the interests of a small group of wealthy and ambitious

Sudanese. He would like to hold in his own hands the power now held by Britain and Egypt. The black peasant from the south is as insignificant for the Mahdi as he is for the present British rulers of the country.

Meanwhile the leaders of the Mahdi's party had finished their evening prayers on the well-kept palace lawn. The dim light of the garden lamps shone on to the rows of carpets on which the leaders of the party which wants independence for the Sudan bowed before the Prophet.

They were not in the least disturbed by the questions put by Abd er Rahman el Mahdi, a few paces away from them, who wanted to know all about the special construction of our Czechoslovak car . . .

The elephant's trunk

In the Caliph Abdullah Museum, dedicated to the fanatical leader of the fearless dervishes, we saw several pale photographs of Khartoum at the turn of the century. Only fifty years ago there was nothing but bare ground and a few primitive huts where now runs an elegant river embankment with an asphalt road and the modern Grand Hotel, where omnibuses bring visitors from the airfield, and where shady gardens now surround the Governor's palace, the Kitchener School of Medicine, and the many fine villas where government officials live. Then, of course, Khartoum was an unimportant village. The capital of the whole country was Omdurman on the opposite bank of the Nile.

The original seat of the Governor, on the steps of which General Gordon was killed by the dervishes a few days before the British troops arrived, has long been removed. Along the streets of Khartoum, which even today (with the exception of the centre of the town) have no pavements for pedestrians, a tramcar with two trailers passes from time to time, hung with clusters of Arab passengers just as in the overcrowded tramcars of Cairo.

The town was built to a well-thought-out plan and solves the traffic problem very well. The ground-plan of the town looks like the divisions on the British flag. The regular oblong blocks are cut by diagonal streets which meet at the circular central square, so that the town is cut up into regular triangles.

The government buildings and most of the houses are planned for breadth, and are lost in the green of their gardens. There are a few higher buildings in the centre of the town, that is all. Most of the year round people sleep on airy verandahs or in the open air in the garden.

There are 60,000 inhabitants in Khartoum — British civil servants and

soldiers, many Egyptian merchants, a large colony of Greeks, a few Syrians and Indians, and even three Czechoslovaks. But the majority of the population is made up of the Sudanese craftsmen, shopkeepers, minor officials and soldiers. The British keep themselves apart from the members of other nations; they have their own social club and it is an iron if unwritten law that no members of other nationalities can be accepted. Neither the Sudanese nor the members of European national groups in Khartoum make any attempt to hide their opinion of this overweening arrogance so typical of the British in the colonial countries.

The Greek colony is pervaded by quite a different spirit. It has its own special life, but is not isolated from the rest of the world behind the walls of a club. The solidarity of the Greeks in the Sudan is proverbial; they have their own schools, sporting and social institutions, charitable organisations and libraries. But they accept into their midst anybody who is willing to settle down there.

Otherwise Khartoum is really a dead city as far as culture is concerned.

In Arabic the name Khartoum means "trunk", from the shape of the spur of land where the White Nile joins the Blue Nile. On the opposite bank is the other half of this largest twin-city in the Sudan, Omdurman, connected with Khartoum by a modern bridge. Today Omdurman has over 120,000 inhabitants, almost exclusively Mohammedans. This is the largest city in the Sudan, but it lives a life of its own, untouched by European influence. The people there talk Arabic just as they do in the narrow, stinking streets of Moroccan Fez, the divided town of Tangier, Kasba in Algiers or the Muski quarter of Cairo, even if the various dialects are so different.

Omdurman is without doubt the pleasantest and cleanest of the Arab-speaking towns of Africa. The Sudanese you meet in the streets greet you with their proverbial smile, letting you see that they consider you guests of their country, and not enemies. The streets of Omdurman are incomparably cleaner than anywhere else in the Arab world. As you walk through the fruit and vegetable market you feel as if you were in the Zoo — only for a moment, of course, before you look more closely at the man behind the high iron fence selling fruit and vegetables and handing them over the fence to the customers. The latter may look at the goods through the fence, but they are not allowed to return anything they have once touched. The health authorities try in this way to prevent the spread of disease. Both sellers and goods are subject to a very strict health inspection before the *suk* starts.

The rule of the British certainly brought the largest town in the Sudan a fundamental improvement in health matters. We frequently saw the efforts

of the British to break down the reserve and mistrust which stands like a barrier between them and the representatives of Mohammedan Omdurman. The real capital of the Sudan, Omdurman, is like a dynamite charge whose fuse has to be carefully and constantly removed. Only half a century ago an avalanche of sixty thousand fanatical dervishes poured out from its walls to attack Kitchener's army. The people of the Sudan have not yet forgotten this, and it is therefore essential to give them the feeling that the new rulers have come with the best of intentions. A dreadful force is sleeping there, and the British are well aware of it.

A typical feature of Omdurman are the craftsmen's workshops. Goldsmiths sitting in their open shops beat fantastic patterns into the soft metal, each more delicate than the last. They have no pattern or model to follow; their sensitive fingers are guided by inborn skill handed down from their forefathers, and create bizarre ornaments of incredible fineness. The silver-smiths work close by; their delicate hammers, chisels, punches and gouges skilfully turn the strips of silver into the fine cobweb filigree of brooches, pendants, earrings, chains, rings, bracelets, spirals and tiny figures. An assistant holds a stick of red-hot silver over a flame before handing it to the master, an old man perhaps of seventy years, with spectacles and a beard, under whose hands it changes into a richly ornamented spiral. In a little while perhaps some Sudanese beauty will walk away with it decorating her ankle above bare feet.

We stood for a long time watching a nine-year-old lad beneath whose fingers grew the shapes of camels, gazelles, elephants, asses, crocodiles and rhinoceroses, snow-white bracelets of tiny scarabs, dress clips, letter-openers, fans and handles, brooches and buckles. Ivory was the material from which all this fairy-like beauty grew, which we had seen in the workroom cases. Slave-hunting and the mad killing of elephants was what the Sudan meant in the imagination of the white world a century ago. Today that all belongs to the irrevocable past — just as do the boat-loads of elephant tusks from the Sudan which used to fetch fantastic prices on the European market. Today ivory slowly disappears beneath the fingers of ivory carvers in Omdurman, patient and smiling.

We went back to Khartoum alongside the tramway lines; over our heads circled a group of fifteen silver aeroplanes whose arrival had been announced the day before by the Khartoum newspapers. In the afternoon we met the commander of the flight, a Swedish air instructor to the Abyssinian Air Force, who was flying some new machines from Stockholm to Addis Ababa.

Together with the Swedish airmen a plane of the British Overseas Air-

ways Corporation landed on the Khartoum aerodrome; this was their regular daily flight to Cape Town. And shortly afterwards a French plane returning from Madagascar to Paris took off in the opposite direction. The largest English newspaper in Khartoum, the daily Sudan Star, has under its title the words: *Khartoum — Air Crossroad of Africa*. And today Khartoum, the "elephant's trunk town", is really becoming the air crossroads of Africa. It remains the sensitive crossroads of interests of two empires whose stars are on the wane. Beneath her runways the dynamite is packed.

The fuse has yet to be laid . . .

Young Sudanese at the dissecting table

According to the statistics issued in the Sudan itself, about 13% of the population of the country can read and write. And those are official statistics!

At the same time you are told that about 90,000 pupils attend all the schools in the Sudan; that is something over one per cent of the population. We were very curious to see what the few schools which do exist looked like.

We were invited to look over the Ahfad private school in Omdurman. Today it has some several hundred pupils, from the tiniest in the nursery school right up to grown-up students who briskly write up on the black-board the formulae for chemical compounds.

Fifty dark little Sudanese rose from their seats in the heptagonal room when we entered with the head master. The Arab woman teacher greeted us with an embarrassed smile and a few words of English.

The walls of the room were hung with pictures, mostly cut out of newspapers and pictorial magazines, showing aeroplanes, submarines, motor-cars, bridges, articles of dress and parts of the body, animals, trees and mosques. We thought of Comenius' picture school when a tiny lad with ebony black face and healthy white teeth walked round the wall with a pointer in his hand and reeled off the Arab ABC according to the pictures:

"*Alif, ba, ta, za, jim, ha, kha . . .*" came clearly from his lips, as the pointer jumped about over the wall.

The energy of these little Sudanese surprised us, and we thought a great deal about the invincible, vital will of these children who are longing to learn. We carried away the picture of the characteristic gesture with which they catch the teacher's attention when they want to answer. The boys jumped out of their seats, their right arms stretched as high as possible into the air and the forefinger raised in challenge. Over and over again. This was not the shy desire of children to show what they knew. In these children's veins

still beats the hot blood of their fathers and grandfathers, who only fifty years ago shook in their hands spears with poisoned tips as they stood lined up to fight beneath the banners of the Mahdi. Today that energy has been packed into school benches; in the eyes of the children we read unsatisfied ambition and the desire for learning. And in the eyes of the eighty-seven-year-old founder of the school we read a feeling of satisfaction as he conversed with us in his calm, quiet voice in the Staff Room.

Sheik Babekr el Badri founded this school a long time ago for his numerous grandchildren, after he had failed to induce the British authorities to open a school for the public. And to this day it is the only well-equipped school in Omdurman. It is a private school, which the children of most of the people in the town cannot afford. And the children of the Sudanese living over most of the country, as big as a quarter of Europe, have never even heard of the school.

In 1924 a medical school was founded in Khartoum for young Sudanese; it bears the English title of the School of Medicine. During the quarter of a century since its foundation 185 students have passed through its classes and completed the course. Only ninetyfive of them graduated with a medical degree such as is given in the universities of Europe. Ninety-five doctors for eight million people in a quarter of a century!

We were given a rather embarrassed explanation by the dean, Dr. R. M. Buchanan:

"There is a tremendous interest among young Sudanese students to enter our School, but in order to keep up the *high* standard of the school, we can choose only the best of the best. Those who graduate possess university degrees which are the equivalent of the degrees of any British university!"

We looked over the lecture rooms, the library, the experimental laboratories and the dissecting room. Here in these rooms a few of the lucky ones among the young people of the Sudan are educated, young people who are longing for a university education, who are longing to elevate their people to a higher cultural standard, to a higher standard of knowledge and to a higher material standard of living. But they are far too few.

"What is your experience of the students?" we asked the dean.

"Better than you would expect. They are unusually intelligent. They know why they are here and we do not have to force them to work hard. By the way, it may interest you to know that this year we accepted two girl students. This is the first time it has happened in the history of our School."

At that moment we remembered those girls of the same faith and the same tongue imprisoned by the bonds of superstition and selfish tradition within the four walls of the houses of Tripoli, behind their barred windows;

we remembered the women who are only allowed to look at the world with one eye through a slit in the traditional *khauli*, who know nothing of culture and progress, whose human existence is stifled by the twisted principles of the very same Koran acknowledged by these first two women students of medicine in the Sudan.

But we remembered, too, the thousands of Sudanese boys and girls as intelligent and capable as these lucky students of medicine in Khartoum. And we remembered the words of the doctor who checked up on our medical certificates at Wadi Halfa when we entered Sudanese territory. We had met few such educated and yet straightforward people during the whole of our journey across Africa. Clever, deep, kind eyes smiled from his ebony face as he confided in us his faith: "One day the Sudan will be a healthy, strong land. We have natural resources, a capable people, we have our own culture and our traditions. But we need schools, good free schools for the whole nation. Then we shall not be ruled by foreigners any more, and we shall seek our own friends. Friends who will not invest money into the Sudan for the sake of profit and of political power, but who will be prepared to work with us as equal with equal . . ."

When we left the Kitchener School of Medicine we saw again in our minds the picture of the ambitious seven-year-olds in the Ahfad school in Omdurman. Every second year seven doctors leave the Medical School with a Latin diploma "*medicinae universae doctor*". When the curly-headed little boys from the Omdurman school grow up, perhaps hundreds of doctors will be graduating every year from regular Sudanese universities.

The Sudan needs them.

A wedding without wedding guests

When we arrived Omdurman was living through a time of great excitement. The wedding of two young members of two of the leading families in the Sudan was being celebrated, and we were invited to the evening celebrations. After sunset we came to the walls of the palace, which from without looked exactly like all the other houses built of clay round about. Only festive lights wreathing the arch over the entrance distinguished it. We were curious both about the setting and about the wedding customs, of which we had heard so many hints thrown out, but of which no European knew anything to tell and no Arab was willing to tell.

We entered the festively decorated courtyard. Rows of tables, comfortable armchairs and couches, thick Persian carpets spread on the sand and

on the well-kept lawns. A military band was playing on the wide verandah. But all around us we saw nothing but European faces: the District Commissioner of Khartoum, leading personalities from the offices and the army, newspapermen, merchants, and "tourists" — almost all the people who represent British colonial rule in the military and economic affairs of the Sudan. There were only a few Sudanese present, from the ruling circles of the country. The evening was a faithful copy of official receptions in European style — only the sound of European music played by Arab soldiers was not the real thing, somehow.

In the course of the evening we learned why there were so few Sudanese present. Even in the richest families the wedding itself takes place in the close family circle very quietly. But the wedding ceremonies are preceded by the betrothal, when the parents of both parties ceremonially sign the wedding contract. This is the occasion for great celebrations which often last two to three weeks. Each evening a different circle of guests is invited. At this wedding the guests on the first evening were the people of Omdurman. On the second evening the members of the most important families in Khartoum and Omdurman gathered. And this evening, the third, was devoted to the representatives of the British authorities and to the European element in the Sudan. The reception ended at ten o'clock. Afterwards the bride was shown for a moment to the women only. Silent and motionless she awaited them in a festively decorated room in her father's house, and throughout the whole evening she was not allowed to speak a single word to any of her guests.

Europeans are not allowed to take part in the wedding celebrations proper, which last far into the night and are accompanied by typical national dances and customs. Here the Sudan only raised the veil a moment from its new, unknown countenance.

Will there be a new Mahdi?

In the Caliph's Museum in Omdurman, together with Gordon's diary from China, the ultimatum sent in a letter by Caliph Abdullah to the British Queen Victoria, and a confusing collection of Sudanese weapons, you will find a relief map of the surroundings of Omdurman. It is a map of the place where on the morning of September 2nd 1898 the historic battle was fought which put an end to the rule of the dervishes, to the fanatical resistance put up by the Sudanese, and the beginning of the sharing of the government of the Sudan under Anglo-Egyptian auspices.

The battle raged only for three and a half hours, but in that short time over ten thousand dervishes fell and another five thousand were taken prisoner. The English and the Egyptians lost 49 men.

One of the cavalry officers, and a war correspondent who sent back reports of the Sudanese campaign, was none other than the Prime Minister of England during the second world war, Winston Churchill. The same Churchill who a year before had taken part as an officer in the British Army in a punitive expedition against the rebellious Indians which burned the crops in the fields below the Peshawar Pass, destroyed the irrigation system, filled in wells and burned down the homes of the rebel Indian tribes; the same Churchill who a year later was fighting the Boers in the Union of South Africa. The same Churchill whose whole life from his youth to his old age is threaded by an unbroken line of war adventures or the preparations for them, and who even today considers the whole world an arena in which man is a mere instrument of war, a pawn set on the chessboard for or against the British king. We saw newspapers containing Churchill's war reports. And then Churchill's thick book "The River War", the last page of which put full stop to the hopes of the fanatical fighters for the freedom of the Sudan.

In November 1947 serious disturbances broke out against the government of the Sudan, in the environs of Khartoum. Over 30,000 members of the Umma party marched through the streets of Khartoum in a demonstration, but in the end the accumulated discontent found an outlet in a clash between the two most powerful parties, Umma and Ashigga. The result was eight dead and a number of wounded. We heard from many people, and even from members of the Umma party, that the Sudanese "do not hate the English". They are said to be discontented with their own government. "They realise the results of England's efforts to bring culture and civilisation to the country, and respect her for it." At the same time they welcome "Sudanisation", the replacing of British officials by Sudanese, and are only discontented with the slow speed at which this policy is being carried out.

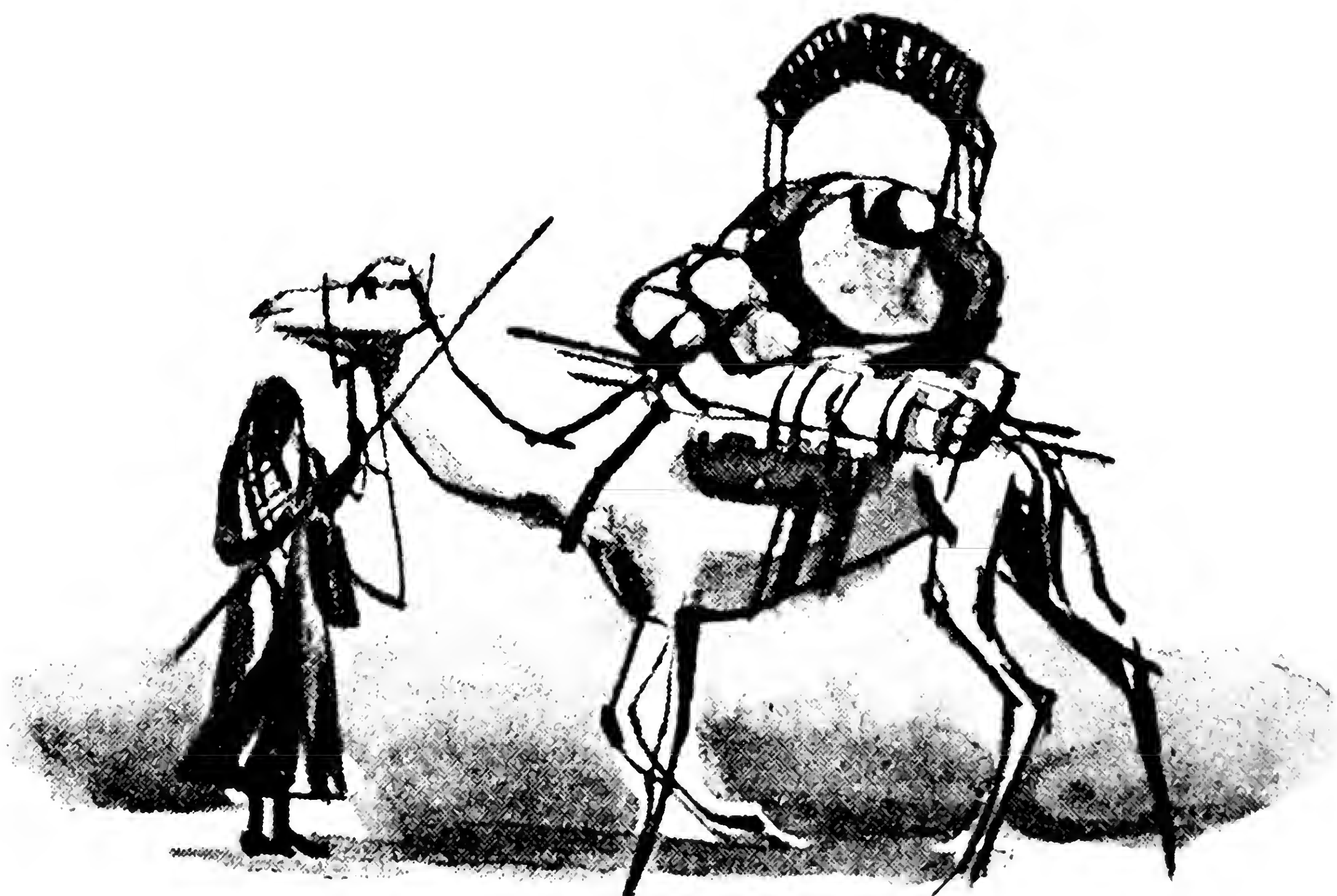
And some members of the Umma party even declared that if the Anglo-Egyptian hold over the country were really to be removed, it would certainly lead to bloody fighting between the members of the Umma and the Ashigga parties. But that is precisely what Great Britain, like all other imperial powers, declares in her efforts to slow down the inevitable development of the colonial and semi-colonial countries, since it cannot be arrested. The British artificially provoke hostility between the two strongest parties in the Sudan and at the same time encourage them to be selfish in order to prove the need for their presence as judges and rulers in the land.

In the leadership of both parties there are too many people whose hands are bound by agreements with the British and the Egyptians. Progressive Sudanese know this, and they also know that neither one nor the other party can lead the country to real independence. These people see quite clearly the reason for the various little points on which the British retreat. They see that the British keep relative peace in the northern region of the Sudan by this policy, and that they can carry on their unscrupulous exploitation of the wealth of southern Sudan without hindrance. They can go on buying sesame seed from the south at fifteen pounds a ton and sell it at seventy five pounds; they can maintain their "state monopoly" for the purchase of agricultural produce in southern Sudan and punish anyone trying to get round the agency of the state, i. e. the British purchasing companies.

These progressive Sudanese were preparing to take a decisive step at the time of our visit to the Sudan. They wanted either to get hold of the majority in the Ashigga party, the National Front Party, and direct its policy towards complete independence for the Sudan and its people, or to found a third, republican party, which would carry out this task against both the existing parties and would clearly reject all reactionary plans for replacing the British king by a Sudanese or Egyptian one.

The Sudan is at the crossroads.

Which way will she turn?





Chapter Eighteen

ACROSS ERITREA TO THE RED SEA

From Khartoum to Nairobi, the centre of British East Africa, is a distance of over 3,000 kilometres by the direct overland route through Juba.

This is the way almost all expeditions from Northern to Central Africa choose. In spite of the fact that southern Sudan differs so much from the northern region, and in spite of the fact that to visit it would certainly bring us much that was new and interesting, we set out from Khartoum in an unusual direction — eastwards. We wanted to drive right across Abyssinia and enter Kenya at Moyale. We were drawn by the great past of Abyssinia and the desire to see at close quarters the people who rose to fight the invader of their country almost barehanded in 1935 and 1936. And we realised that such a possibility of proving the technical superiority of our car in mountainous country as Abyssinia offered would not occur again in the whole of Africa.

In their pre-war propaganda leaflets the Italians claimed that they had built a network of main roads in Abyssinia. We hoped that this would help us to climb the tremendously steep gradients and conquer the vast distances.

For the first time we intended to reach a height of nearly 10,000 feet above sea level on roads. Of course we had no idea that propaganda material from the year 1938 is far from presenting the true situation as it appeared at the turn of 1947—8.

A mountaineering puzzle in the middle of the steppe

The appearance of the countryside in the Sudan east of the point where the Blue and the White Nile join is quite different from that of the north. You rarely see a human habitation. The excellent canvas-backed maps we got in Khartoum had many white patches, but not because the terrain has not been explored. For dozens and dozens of kilometres nothing but dried-up steppe lies alongside the road, desperately flat country, enlivened here and there by clumps of thorny sedar trees with up-turned umbrella foliage. From time to time a dried-up *wadi* crosses the sandy track, announcing itself in the distance with thicker vegetation. For months the bushes live on the rain soaked in during the wet months. All at once the track turns into two lines of well-trodden sand separated from each other by a high ridge of dry grass. All around on both sides is nothing but tall dry grass, the white steppe, tired, burnt, enlivened only by occasional herds of half-wild camels. The track makes a straight line from horizon to horizon.

After hundreds of kilometres of monotonous driving we met the first vehicle; it was a Fiat lorry standing on the track. It was of course our duty to stop and offer help, but the crew did not need it. They were just resting. To start off we talked Arabic, but of course our Arabic was not good enough for fluent conversation, especially when it came to details of the car.

And then the Negro driver of the lorry let out a flood of perfect Italian at us. He was a bright lad, and knew more about engines than many a European taxi-driver. He asked technical questions about the Tatra, and his head kept disappearing beneath the bonnet or beneath the chassis. He had learned Italian in Abyssinia and Eritrea, but he was equally fluent in both the difficult languages of the Abyssinians, Amharic and Tigré. He had been driving the roads of East Africa for many years, and we made good use of the chance to get first-hand information on the state of the roads, distances, and the possibility of refilling with oil and petrol. We had had unfortunate experience with such information picked up by chance, but this informant aroused our confidence. We particularly asked about the road to Kassala, from where he happened to be driving. He told us the distance to a kilometre, declared with absolute certainty that we could easily ford the river

Atbara at Asubri itself, which was the nearest village, and then went on to give us a detailed description of the road right to Asmara. He almost counted every bend in the road and every milestone. He had left Asmara seven days before. During the first few kilometres we satisfied ourselves that in this respect there was not the slightest difference between drivers on the roads of North Africa and those of the Sudan; whether they know the road or not, they consider it their sacred duty to cheer you up rather than give factual advice.

After driving for four hundred kilometres we came to the river Atbara at sunset; we had already crossed this river once, in the north, at the approaches to Khartoum. The shallow banks of the river were peppered with the conical hats of native huts. These were no longer the clean, pleasant streets of Omdurman, and the people living in Asubri were very different from the Sudanese we had met in the north, in Omdurman and Khartoum. Here we saw thin, under-nourished shepherds and children dressed in rags. The government of the Sudan was not interested in them, for there was nothing to be gained from their poor pastures, and at the same time they were not such a militant, fearless crowd as the descendants of the dervishes of Omdurman.

And yet for all their poverty the Sudanese in Asubri hospitably offered to take us in. Before we knew what was happening one of the huts was made ready for us with two primitive beds of thin plaited straps on a wooden frame. But the flooded ford of the Atbara here threw out all our calculations, and threatened to lengthen considerably our journey to Eritrea. Far to the south of the village of Asubri the only railway bridge crosses the river, carrying the line from El Obeid to Port Sudan. We had to make good use of every minute of our time.

It was late in the evening before the Tatra drove out into the open savannah, twenty kilometres north of the bridge over the Atbara. The fatigue of the day easily got the better of our fears of snakes and scorpions, against which the Europeans in Khartoum so anxiously warn you. We put our two sleeping bags on the ground in front of the car, hung the loops of the mosquito-nets on the flag-masts, took two gulps of condensed milk — and in ten minutes the flood of impressions gained during the day changed into the first restless dreams.

Soon after sunrise the iron gratings between the railway lines of the Butana bridge rattled under the wheels of the Tatra, until she drove up the steep embankment on the eastern bank of the Atbara.

Hardly had we got beyond the bridge when we ran into a small caravan of nomads ready to set out. Men, women and children sat enthroned among

all their household possessions on the loaded backs of camels, as on a look-out post. A long plank was fixed across the water bags and the piles of implements, ten feet above ground. In the middle sat the bearded old nomad and beside him, one on each end, his pride — a two-year-old and a three-year-old son. The younger might have been more fittingly seated in his mother's lap, but he behaved with the utmost unconcern on his living tower.

The caravan was leaving one of its temporary homes, a group of conical huts of grass and twigs, near the bridge. They were going over the river to the west — and we were going on towards the rising sun.

Just beyond the bridge we saw a miniature relief map of the Swiss Alps, all in the space of a few hundred square yards. It was made by clay soil mixed with sand and rocks, riven by innumerable deep valleys where the streams of water tried to find their way to the river during the rainy season.

The road ran alongside the railway line like a ruler, in a north-eastern direction. In the distance before us the outlines of mountains appeared; for a long time we thought they were torn storm clouds. For hours they climbed up over the horizon, to form a range of strange shapes. After the thousands of dreary kilometres through the plains of Egypt and the Sudan we saw real mountains for the first time, high, jutting in weird shapes, with oval tops as if cast from a single block of reddish-brown granite. Among them lies our last goal in the Sudan — Kassala.

We made a short report, had our passports and the car's papers stamped, changed our last Egyptian piastres for East African shillings, filled up with petrol and away we went towards the frontiers of a new land, Eritrea.

The kilometres slipped by, the sun began to sink in the west, but the massive heights of Jebel Kassala still retreated in front of us. Again and again we turned our eye towards those majestic cupolas which rise on the frontier of the Sudan like a contrast to the endless sandy plains and steppe from which they rise to the sky. The steep smooth sides of these mountains are a challenge to the boldest mountain-climbers; in spite of many attempts the central peak of the Kassala range has only been climbed once, although it is over eight hundred feet lower than Sněžka.

Asphalt once more after 4,000 kilometres

Beyond Kassala the road divides into several branches. The compass is no help, nor are detailed maps; here you have the choice of several roads which all lead to Tessenei, the frontier post in Eritrea.

With many fears we drove towards the mountains which made a high

barrier round the whole horizon. We had still too fresh in our memories the gentle slopes of the north Sudanese hills with their countless dried-up riverbeds which transformed our road into a military training ground covered with artificial tank traps. We felt that somewhere in the middle of these mountains the road would end in a blind alley from which we should not be able to escape.

Then a Sudanese guard stopped us; he wore short skirts reminiscent of a Scottish kilt. Writing down our licence number carefully on a scrap of paper he told us that three kilometres further on we should be leaving the Sudan behind. Like a coloured film the memories of all that had happened since we crossed the northern frontiers of the Sudan passed through our minds — our desperate wanderings in the desert on the last two bottles of tea, the snail's pace at which we had covered the rocky ground, the sand-channels — and we wondered rather fearfully what was waiting for us in Eritrea.

Then the Tatra bumped over a few pits in the road and all at once a milestone appeared. An absolutely ordinary milestone — but for us it was the first since we had left Lower Egypt. And here were the first yards of firm road with steep embankments made secure against subsidence, the first white concrete bridges over the countless *wadis*. These were the first unmistakable signs that we were once again in a land which had been under Italian rule.

The road on the left leads to Sabderat, that on the right to Tessenei. You can have no doubts at all, for the signpost points to *Bivio Tessenei* with the figures 34 in large type and 383 in small. Less than four hundred kilometres separated us from the capital of Eritrea, Asmara, where a commission of representatives of the four Great Powers had just arrived to decide the fate of one of the former Italian colonies. We involuntarily recalled the excellent road along the North African coast, linking Tunis with Egypt, and something told us that in the Italian colonies the problem of roads never really existed; they were a matter of course, even if they had to be torn out of the earth, cut into the rock, or protected by railings over drops of three hundred feet and more.

The kilometres tick past with the regularity of a chronometer as we pass beneath the mountain peaks. Here we do not need to fix our gaze on the road in front of the car and live in constant fear for our springs, tyres, and chassis.

The sun's rays gave a last caress to the rounded peaks of Jebel Kassala, nodding a greeting to us from the Sudan and recalling a caravan of camels chained together by an invisible rope.

The Sudan sent us its last farewell.

In Tessenei we were greeted in fluent Italian by Eritrean customs officers wearing the Garibaldi hats of the *bersaglieri*. They told us to put our watches forward an hour and readily showed the way to the police station. We should have found it anyway, because the giant information table with its prismatic lenses allows of no mistake. Then you rub your eyes once more, for the car is purring along smooth asphalt which recalls the best roads in the French Riviera or the broad band of the excellent Moroccan highway. Palms drop behind on both sides of the road and only the signposts with their exact tale of kilometres passed tell us that it is not a dream, and that that very morning we had packed up our sleeping bags in the grassy steppe and swallowed clouds of dust.

Living corpses on the roads

In Tessenei you feel for a while as if you were in the Wild West. It is a typical colonial spot, with all the signs of hasty growth.

Here are houses of corrugated iron — certainly the heritage of the war; and then thatched roofs. There is a cinema which is in fact a concrete projection chamber and box office, with a high fence surrounding rows of seats. Stars shine overhead as the projector rumbles, and the dark velvet-soft African night draws your thoughts away from the old, naive Italian film to somewhere far above the crowns of the palms. And then the lights blind you, without tact or consideration, and show you the face of the country on whose soil you are spending the first few hours. A few ragged Italians gaze in front of them without interest, perhaps remembering their days of hope, prosperity, and a promising future. The remaining spectators are Negroes in linen shorts from war stores and in "tunics" belted with a strap or a piece of string round the hips. Their eyes are shining with expectation as they wait excitedly for the next scenes of a film which may have been seen on the screens of Europe twenty years ago.

We tried to read the thoughts of the people round us, and could not help recalling the words with which the customs official greeted us on the soil of Eritrea: "Never stop if you see a man lying in the road. The law of compassion does not apply here. Try to drive round him, and if you cannot, drive over him!"

At first we did not know how to take it — as a cruel joke or as a piece of well-meant advice. It was not until later that we realised that this Eritrean customs officer meant what he said; since the war there had been a great

increase in the activity of bands of robbers in Eritrea, who lay in wait for motorists at places where they were forced to slow down. On level roads they employed more drastic methods which at least at first were effective.

It was an unwritten law among drivers in the less frequented areas of Eritrea to stop whenever they saw a stationary car with the driver inspecting his engine. Perhaps you could be of help or even lend a spare part. It would never occur to you that the break-down might only be an excuse for a band of robbers to stop you and attack you from their hiding place a few yards further on.

Another almost incredible method they employed, and one which again recalls the Wild West here in the heart of Africa, also counted on human sympathy. You could scarcely be expected to pass by a man lying in the middle of the road and looking as if he had had a stroke or an accident. Only — as soon as you stopped to offer first aid the dead man would come to life and so would the bushes which line most of the roads in western Eritrea, and you would get what was coming to you from the robber gang, in whose vocabulary the word "sympathy" does not exist.

Naturally enough, many a driver who has found himself in difficulties has had to pay for the methods employed by a few unscrupulous individuals; one can hardly expect the driver of another car to respond to desperate signals and lend one a pump or a patch for a punctured tyre. Although during the several days we spent in Eritrea we did not meet these living corpses, we never stopped when we saw a stationary car by the roadside, the more so as immediately after our arrival in Asmara all the newspapers were full of convincing reports of an omnibus attacked on the mountain road between Asmara and Massava. Several lives lost were a far more forcible argument than the report issued for the reassurance of the public, stating that strong police units had been sent to find the whereabouts of the perpetrators of the crime, who had taken to the mountains with their booty . . .

To the west of Asmara

Keren in Eritrea is a strange, interesting little place. If we had not been used for months now to the idea that we were in Africa we might have felt as if it was still the third day of our journey — in the Alps. It is a small, clean, well-kept little town sheltered in the bend of a wild valley surrounded by steep crags. Not even the little church on the hill is missing, with its slim white spire.

Round Keren the country is dotted with the big brown patches of ancient

baobab trees. Some of them are approaching their end, and the giant hollow trunks are slowly mouldering away. One of them attracted our attention by its unusual breadth and its strange adornment. Sixteen Italian soldiers owed their lives to this tree. The incident occurred during the last war, when there was heavy fighting between British and Italian troops for possession of Keren. A British air attack surprised a group of Italians near the hollow baobab tree, and all sixteen of them hid inside its trunk. A bomb dropped by a low-flying plane passed through the tree, exploding just beyond it. Two openings and many cracks in the trunk bear witness to the truth of the story to this day. Not one of the soldiers was wounded.

Today there is a little chapel in the tree, a place of pilgrimage for black and white Christians for miles around.

The grey ribbon of the road winding far among the mountains to the east leads us further into the heart of Eritrea. The road bites into the steep hillsides, slips from pass to pass, and then suddenly hides among shady orange, palm and papaw groves in the bend of a deep valley, and winds through a gay avenue of bougainvillia. It has something in common with the roads of the French Riviera, but its charm is emphasised by the wild frame of the great mountains of Eritrea. A few kilometres beyond Keren, beyond the vast fields of white crosses in the military cemetery, the car climbs to over 6,500 feet above sea level, only to fall again sharply into a winding valley with a dried-up riverbed. And then again through hairpin bends to the clouds. At the edge of the road, daringly perched over three-hundred-foot abysses, grow enormous *euphorbia candelabris*, which at first we took for tree cacti.

This romantic road hides many a danger for the motorist. Many have paid a heavy price for too great daring. You involuntarily slow down before every black notice with the empty eye-sockets staring from a skull and cross-bones. There is a different tragedy behind each of them. We gradually got used to the sharp bends and to the deep chasms below us — after all, this was still only the beginning. Asmara itself is 7,800 feet above sea level, and from there leads the notorious mountain road down to Massava on the coast.

You see few villages for hundreds of kilometres along this road, only a few *tukuls* and the clean little towns of Barentu, Agordat and Keren. There are no more for the whole length of the road from the Sudanese frontier to the capital of Eritrea. But every little while you meet pilgrims on the road. Caravans of camels and herds of cattle pass through the country, for the majority of the people in these parts live a nomad life. Once upon a time there used to be permanent settlements of dark Eritreans deep on the floor of the valleys, but they have long forgotten their old homes. The first

Italian colonisers drove them out and created enormous estates here, where even today, after Italy has been defeated in the last war, hundreds of Eritrean serfs are still working for the former fascist Italian leaders.

The Eritreans of the eastern region are mostly tall, slim and as black as ebony; they have long narrow faces and unusually beautiful regular features, with a straight narrow nose, and a noble brow topped by a mop of curly hair. They live half-naked, always armed with a curved machet and a long spear. While watching a car or conversing among themselves they always stand on one leg, resting the other foot against their knee. Young Eritreans are incredibly shy, and flee hastily away from the road as soon as they hear the sound of a car approaching.

On the way to Barentu we had a puncture, the third since leaving Prague. As we were changing the wheel we suddenly noticed a young Eritrean not far from the road, curiously watching this strange car. It took a long time before he grew friendly enough to come closer and accept a cigarette, but in the end he ever begged for a lift . . .

Representatives of the representatives of the Big Four

The view changes so often and with such surprising rapidity that before we notice it the first white houses of Asmara rise in front of us.

We are in the capital of Eritrea, a former Italian colony under the temporary rule of the British military authorities. Here there are broad modern streets, white buildings in the typical Italian colonial style, and a big cathedral built of red brick which combines features of romanesque architecture with those of the present day.

We saw thick groves of eucalyptus trees, and busy streets. Numerous cars drove about, most of them veterans of Italian manufacture. The shop windows were full of goods, but on closer inspection we found that on the whole they were second-rate goods at fantastic prices. The thin, shabby Italians and the local people alike walk past the shop windows without buying, although their eyes hungrily devour the piles of goods displayed. The shops are empty, and everything speaks of economic stagnation.

Eritrea is waiting, and at this moment its fate is being decided.

At the time we arrived in Asmara the spokesmen of political organisations and national groups living in Eritrea were being received by a mixed commission of representatives of the four Great Powers which was to put before the United Nations Organisation proposals for the future fate of the country. From morning till night a large group of delegates of the Soviet

Union, Great Britain, France and the United States worked behind barbed wire surrounding the hotel belonging to the former Italian company Compagnia Italiana Alberghi Africa Orientale, known throughout the land under its initials CIAAO. Their programme was entirely taken up with conferences, discussions with representatives of political groups with diametrically opposed interests, and sessions behind closed doors. Short-wave transmitters passed over the ether every evening the results of these secret meetings, while the local journalists tried in vain to persuade members of the various delegations to break their irritating silence and give some real information about the future of the country.

The leading Asmara paper, *Eritrea Nuova*, greeted the arrival of the commission with an article both complaining and militant in tone, entitled "The representatives of the representatives of the Big Four in Eritrea". We recalled the time when the occupying Italians did not ask the Eritrean people for their opinion. But today they are complaining: "Poor old Eritrea, our beloved! Even the very aerodrome where the planes bringing the delegates landed today and where the flag of the British Air Force flies, is the work of those Italians who sixty years ago took you by the hand and lovingly led you towards a happy future, a future which is today the subject of unjust negotiation . . .

"To put up in a luxury hotel (look, even this hotel is the work of Italian hands!) is a very different thing from landing on a forsaken shore with two litres of drinking water and camping in the Sabergum desert, or fighting your way step by step and leaving behind as you go two crossed boughs with the name of a faithful friend stifled by the bloody breath of the *khamsein* . . ." And the melancholy note of the whole article ends with clear enough words to qualify the temporary "occupation": "It has not yet occurred to anybody to remove from the majestic governor's palace, whose walls alone will have the right to hear the secret councils of the representatives of the representatives of the Big Four, the Italian inscription engraved on the foundation stone by the Italian viceroy: 'The nations and the territory of the Empire of Abyssinia have been placed under the absolute and unchangeable sovereignty of the Kingdom of Italy.' Who knows whether any members of the commission can read Italian . . .?"

A few days later we recalled this article in the leading Italian newspaper, as we drove through the little town of Dekameré, a few dozen kilometres from the Eritrean-Abyssinian frontier. Barracks after barracks all along the road on both sides, and faded Italian inscriptions *Zona proibita*. This was a forbidden zone for everybody, for it was here that Mussolini and his Fascists built their great jumping-off ground for their campaign against

unarmed Abyssinia. It was from here that the stream of Italian units poured across the frontiers in 1935 before the general public got to know the names on the map of Abyssinia and became familiar with the use of aeroplanes, tanks and gas against the armies of the Negus.

On the one hand fine roads, in some places even schools for the people of Eritrea — and on the other hand typical colonial exploitation of serf labour on the plantations of a few chosen immigrants, and the building up of military bases for attack on the neighbouring country. That is the sum of Italian rule in Eritrea for sixty years. The Big Four commission came to inspect the balance-sheet — but three of the powers represented in it have not even the roads and the schools in their own colonies today.

Tug-of-war over Eritrea

Eritrea, which is roughly the area of Czechoslovakia, has about 800,000 inhabitants, according to official estimates. Even official statements emphasise that this can only be an estimate, for in this land of mountains and nomad tribes it is not possible to establish reliable figures.

Besides the Europeans there are people of about a dozen nationalities living on the territory of Eritrea, people who differ from one another by their language as well as their tribal signs. The nilotic group of semi-pagans alone speak a number of different dialects. In the lowlands of Beni Amer lives a group of Mohammedan shepherds speaking the *Tigré* and *Beja* languages. In the mountains to the east of this tribe are Mohammedan nomads who move from place to place. You can hear pure Arabic spoken on the shores of the Red Sea, but a few miles inland around the gulf of Zula you will not understand a word, for the people there have their own language, *Saho*. The nomad Dankali tribe, Coptic Christians, the Belein tribe from round Keren, Arab and European half-castes — that is only a brief enumeration of some of the racial and language groups in this country.

The political situation in Eritrea is so complicated that it is difficult to find the exact line of division between the interests of the various groups, none of whom will even hear of compromise. In addition to the liberal party, whose aim is the complete independence of their country, there is the numerically strong Moslem League, which tries to get hold of the power even in areas where Islam is quite foreign to the people. Then the party supported by the Abyssinian government also wants to have a voice in deciding the fate of the country; they use historical arguments to back up their demands for the whole of Eritrea to be united with Abyssinia. And

finally a newly-founded party, supported by the Italians, demands the return of Italian rule. When the fate of the country was being decided four non-Eritrean groups had their say as well — the Italians, Greeks, Indians and Jews.

We were present at a press conference given by representatives of the various parties and witnessed the methods they each used against their political opponents. According to their rules twice two is never four. The representative of the Moslem League declared with absolute certainty that his party's programme was backed by exactly 731,260 supporters. To the objection that the whole population of the country amounted only to 800,000 he replied that the statistics were forged and that his information was correct.

The party which supported the demands of Italy, and which had only been founded forty days before the Four Power Commission had arrived, had counted their supporters with the same care; they doubted whether they could number less than three hundred thousand . . .

"A lie has only one leg," remarked one of their opponents drily, "and if that is lamed it can run no further." This Tigré proverb, spoken calmly and seriously, roused a violent argument, which culminated in the accusation hurled by the Moslem League spokesman at the representative of the pro-Abyssinian party: "We all know who your supporters are — the prostitutes of Asmara and the dead . . ."

Eritrea had reached the state the British military authorities wanted to have her in. There was neither unity nor common aim in the country, but only conflict between political groups led by ambitious individuals or by the mouthpieces of greedy neighbours and colonial powers; clashes and squabbles. The British military government did all it could to encourage this, so as to remain the only strong voice in the land. And the majority of the Eritrean people themselves, living the primitive nomad life of shepherds, were left without a real spokesman, divided by the selfish conflicts of their leaders.

2,500 bends in 113 kilometres

Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, lies 7,300 feet above sea level among enchanting mountains. And yet as the crow flies it is not more than seventy kilometres from the shores of the Red Sea. Not even Switzerland, the country famed for its mountain roads, can offer such a fascinating sight as that granted to the motorist who sets out to drive from Asmara to the Eritrean port of Massava.

The modern streets of this town which has grown rapidly give way to

a smooth avenue of tall eucalyptus trees; the road climbs a hundred feet or so higher and then all at once a breath-taking view opens out before you. Far, as far as the eye can see, stretches the mountain range with its peaks wrapped in a slight haze through which the sun's rays struggle. Cut into the steep slopes of the mountainside is the narrow ribbon of the road, winding above abysmal cliffs in innumerable bends. Beneath one slice of road another appears three or four hundred feet lower down, and a train drawn by a Diesel locomotive runs like a lizard over the elegant arches of a bridge, to disappear in a tunnel.

The bedewed web of the telegraph wires, glittering in the morning sun, falls far into the valley below and a little later you see them not far from the road, clambering down among the giant euphorbias often at an angle of more than sixty degrees. The laws of architects and road-builders on the maximum gradient of roads, the radius of curves and the angle of descent, have no validity for telegraph poles, which take the shortest cut regardless of chasms, mountain slopes, tunnels and vegetation.

On the 113 kilometre long road from Asmara to Massava you can count over two and a half thousands bends — a test for both the driver's nerves and his machine.

At the most dangerous points, where the jaws of the abyss yawn some thousand feet below you, the edge of the road is protected by massive pillars and iron railings, but even so it is unpleasant to imagine what might happen if the brakes or the steering gear were to fail. In some places the bends form a curve of more than 180° , for the hairpin goes on after the bend to bite into the very cliff you passed over a few minutes before a few yards higher up. The slopes above the road are perfectly secure against landslides and tropical rains, and there are concrete drainage channels and protective walls against falls of rock. The road is as flat as a table when it runs level for a while, and then follows a sharp bend you are forced to take quickly. You get the feeling that a car with a high-placed centre of gravity would overturn if it stopped half way round the bend.

In the Sudan a motorist has often thirty to sixty feet of road to choose from either side; if he doesn't like the look of the road, he can go a few yards away on either side, for the terrain is everywhere the same, flat and ploughed up by dried-up trickles of water. But on the road from Asmara to Massava you have to count every centimetre on each side, when you meet a lorry going the other way. The black notices with the white skull and cross-bones, visible from afar, are no rarity on this mountain road. As you drive nearer you can read the English inscription: *Slow down! Fatal accident here* 12. VI. 1944. The dates vary, but the words are always the same sad

refrain: "Slow down! Fatal accident here such and such a day." You involuntarily listen to the squeal of your brakes — and then it is better not to look down into the bottomless pit which yawns in front of you. Perhaps some driver ended his life down there when he failed to calculate the angle of the bend accurately enough, or when his nerves failed him. And yet there is plenty of traffic on the Asmara—Massava road. Drivers often surprise you round a bend, not minding in the least that you are driving down this road for the first time, while they are used to taking heavy lorries up and down here hundreds of times.

The monkeys attack

On the map of Eritrea the little town of Nefasit is written in the same type as any other place of a few hundred inhabitants. This is where the road to Dekameré branches off, later to become the main road to Addis Ababa. But if you approach this insignificant little town from the Asmara—Massava road you can never forget the picture it presents. In the opposite direction, coming up from the Red Sea, it is perhaps just an unimportant place you remember only for its hedges of candlestick trees and its half-naked children. But if you get a birds-eye view of Nefasit you automatically slow down, draw in carefully to the side of the road as soon as you come to a level stretch, and get out your telescope. Only an aerial view can perhaps be compared with this enchanting prospect.

Far beneath you you see the tiny match-box houses arranged along the shining strip of asphalt which winds like a snake. From time to time it disappears behind the grey cliff or plunges into the dark green of trees and bushes, and comes out into the light again — like Punkva in the Moravian limestone hills. From time to time a miniature canoe glides down this asphalt streamlet, but the lenses of your telescope change this fairy-tale boat into the every-day shape of an American eight-cylinder car or a military lorry. You cannot have enough of this view and hardly feel like driving down into the valley.

Then the car slowly swallows up the innumerable bends in the road and after many minutes you are driving through a tunnel of euphoria at the bottom of the valley, between the steep cliff walls. The tops of the crags are lost in the clouds flying overhead with incredible speed. You drive past a rocky ledge beyond Nefasit, where shepherds from round about are just beginning their cattle market. You expect the road to rise again beyond the Nefasit valley, but meanwhile you see beyond the camels lying down in the marketplace and the nomads running hither and thither an opening in the

giant cliffs revealing yet another abysmal valley attainable down dozens of hairpin bends.

All at once we saw on a slope above the road a herd of creatures whose movements looked human in the distance. Then they jumped quickly into the tree-tops. At the same moment a few rocks fell right in front of the car, within an inch of the bonnet. The monkeys are attacking. It looks as though they have learned these undesirable habits from the gangs of robbers who from time to time use these cliffs as a refuge from police patrols. Then the large brown bodies started dropping from the trees and jumping away quickly into the thick undergrowth, starting a shower of little stones as they went. The stones set others in motion, and in a short while an avalanche of rocks was slipping down somewhere behind us. We were glad to get off so lightly in our first encounter with the monkeys of Africa.

After a three hours' drive the gleaming Red Sea appeared ahead. We were in Massava, the hottest port in East Africa — fortunately we only stayed a few hours, and those unusually cool. The thermometer showed little over eighty-six degrees Fahrenheit in the shade.

The Europeans in Massava are always moving out. Not only the great heat, which often reaches a hundred and forty degrees, but even more so the humid air and the small difference between the night and day temperature causes complete physical and mental exhaustion in less resistant white people.

And yet Massava has its own charm, typical of East African ports. Little boats softly rock on the blue waves and the white crests beat against the landing quays. Ocean-going liners are anchored a little way off, keeping up steam. Tomorrow they will set off on their pilgrimage to Table Mountain or into the narrow strip of salt water between Suez and Port Said.

The infinite ocean . . .

Beyond the flat hinterland of Massava, a few dozen kilometres away, the mountain eagles circle over the steep walls of the abysses which the tireless bends of the mountain road climb towards the heavens.

And beyond the rocky mountain peaks hide the awe-inspiring, wild crags of the mountains of Abyssinia, through which our Tatra must make its way to the heart of Africa.

A

Abbas II. Hilmi

Egyptian viceroy 1892—1914; followed an anti-British policy; under his government the nationalist movement in Egypt grew strong.

Abdin

the royal palace in Cairo.

Abusir

a village near Cairo, with the ancient burial-ground of the kings of the Vth dynasty (2563—2423 B. C.), three great pyramids and adjacent temples dedicated to the kings Sahu-ré, Neferirkaré and Niveserré.

Aeronar

a Czechoslovak telescope produced by the National Enterprise Meopta.

al Abram

Arabic pl. of *haram*, pyramid; a part of Cairo.

Allabu yahsin

dialect form of *Allabu ya hasin*, "Oh, Allah, Giver of strength."

Amenemhet III

ancient king of Egypt of the XIIth dynasty (1850—1800 B. C.); he devoted great attention to the utilisation of the Faiyum oasis for irrigation purposes, and extended the growing of crops.

Amenhotep III

ancient king of Egypt of the XVIIIth dynasty (1405—1370 B. C.) under whose rule Egypt was an extensive empire stretching from Nubia to the Euphrates.

Amenrè

up to the time of the XVIIIth dynasty (c. 1500 B. C.) the god of the town of Veset (Thebes) in Upper Egypt, Amon, and Rè, the sun god, were united in one official god Amenra, to whom the great temple in Karnak was dedicated.

andiamo, signori

(Italian) "Off we go, gentlemen."

ash

the last of the six prayers prescribed by Islam, performed at ten o'clock in the evening.

Ashigga

one of the political parties of the Sudan, favourable to Egypt, also known as the National Front.

askari

soldiers, desert patrol usually mounted on camels.

asr

the afternoon prayer (the fourth in the day) performed at five o'clock.

Ataturk, Mustafa Kemel

Turkish statesman who was President of the Republic from 1923 until his death in 1938; he introduced many religious and social reforms. After the title of Pasha was abolished by law in 1934 he took the name of Kemel Ataturk.

Aya Sofia (Hagia Sofia)

originally the main cathedral of the Greek Orthodox Church in the Eastern Roman Empire. in Constantinople. The Turks turned it into a mosque.

al Azhar

(Arabic word meaning blossoming) the ancient Mohammedan university in Cairo, founded 969, the biggest religious seat of learning of the Mohammedan world.

B

Bairam

the two greatest Mohammedan feasts; Lesser Bairam, which falls on the first day of the month following the fast-month of Ramadan; and Greater Bairam, which begins on the tenth day of month of pilgrimage and lasts four days.

Balbo, Italo

Marshal of the Italian Air Force, who was Governor-General of Libya from 1933.

Balilla

former fascist youth organisation, founded in 1925.

baobab

(*Adansonia digitata*) a tree of the tropical and sub-tropical zones of Africa, which reaches giant proportions; bears melon-like fruit.

Beja

a language-group of certain nomad Nubian tribes (see also: Bisharin)

Belzoni, Giambattista (1778—1823)

Italian traveller and collector of Egyptian antiquities, who opened the cliff temple of Abusimbel, the pyramid of King Khafre in Giza, discovered the tomb of King Seth I in the Valley of the Kings, and the ruins of the town of Berenike on the shores of the Red Sea.

bersaglieri

Italian: mountain hunters, infantry troops who wore wide felt hats.

bilharziasis

a disease widespread in Egypt, the Near East, and China, caused by blood flukes of the family Schistosomidae or Distomidae haematobia; it attacks mainly the kidneys, bladder and intestines.

Bisharin

member of a nomad tribe living in Nubia between the Red Sea and the Nile; together with the tribes of Hadendoa, Beni Amer, and others, they form the language-group called in Arabic Beja.

bougainvillia

a climbing tropical plant of the genus Nyctaginaceae, named after the French explorer Louis Antoine de Bougainville, who set out to sail round the world in 1766.

Brandenburgertor

the triumphal Brandenburg Arch in Berlin, erected 1789—1793 and modelled on the Propylaeum of Athens.

buon giorno, come sta?

(Italian) "Good morning, how do you do"?

C

Caliph

Mohammed's successor; Arabic title for rulers of the Mohammedan Empire.

Cato, Marcus Porcius (234—149 B. C.)

Roman statesman who prepared the Carthaginian War.

Champollion, Jean Francois (1790—1832)

French scholar who after a lifelong study of hieroglyphics succeeded in deciphering the main characters in 1822, thus opening the way to knowledge of ancient Egypt on the basis of contemporary inscriptions. The founder of Egyptology.

CIAAO

abbreviation for Compagnia Italiana Alberghi Africa Orientale: The Italian East African Hotel Company.

Ciano, Galeazzo

Fascist Italian minister from 1936; son-in-law of Mussolini, he was executed in 1944 for high treason and for plotting against the life of Mussolini: he had hoped to wipe out the account against him for war-crimes.

Compiègne

town in northern France where the Germans capitulated at the end of the first world war, and where the capitulation of France in 1940 was signed, giving Hitler control over the whole of France and the Atlantic coast.

D

dahabiah

a large boat used on the Nile, for living purposes as well.

Dashur

a village to the south of Cairo, near which are the pyramids of the ancient kings of the XII dynasty (2000—1785 B. C.) Amenemhet II, Senvosret III and Snophrev.

Darius I

king of Persia who ruled over Egypt from 522—485 B. C. He restored the canal between the Nile, the Bitter Lakes, and the Red Sea (now the valley of Tumilat).

demotic characters

from the Greek: the popular, simplified form of the ancient Egyptian script, used from 700—470 B. C., under the rule of Persia, Greece and Rome. It developed from the hieratic characters (q. v.).

dervish

poor man, beggar; member of mohammedan brotherhood, a wandering monk or fakir.

dom

a kind of palm tree with fan-shaped leaves and brown fruit the size and shape of a chestnut.

dragoman

interpreter, guide for foreign visitors.

dûhr

the third, midday prayer, performed at 1 p. m.

durra

a certain kind of millet.

E

Effendi

(Turkish) title given to men of learning, later came to mean gentleman, member of the upper classes.

Eos

ancient Greek goddess of the dawn; according to legend Titon, one of the founders of Troy, fathered her son Memnon; the Romans called the two giant statues of Amenhotep III to the west of Luxor the Memnon colossi, after him.

esparto

(Spanish) hay; tall steppe grass, *Stipa tenacissima*, which is known in northern Africa as alfa or halfa grass. It contains as much as 55% cellulose and is a valuable raw material in the manufacture of paper.

Etareta

camera manufactured in Czechoslovakia for 35 mm. films.

euphorbia candelabris

the candlestick tree, which has cactus-like trunk and branches; it grows in tropical and sub-tropical mountainous regions.

F

fadjir

the first, early morning prayer performed at five in the morning.

Fashoda

a trading station on the White Nile in the Sudan, known as Kodok since 1905; the scene of the clash between French and British imperialism in 1898, when the British scotched the French plans for creating a continuous belt of territory under their rule from Senegal in the west to Somaliland in the east.

Fatims

Mohammedan rulers of Egypt from 969-1171, who traced their descent from Fatima, the daughter of Mohammed. Gohar, the general of Fatim el Muizz, conquered Egypt and founded the new capital of Cairo.

fellah

(pl. fellahin) peasant.

felucca

a small boat with sails, used on the Nile.

Frauenkirche

a Gothic church in Munich.

G

gallabiah

the Arab word for the outer garment worn by Egyptians; it has long loose sleeves reaching to the ground.

ghibli

((from the Arabic *jabali* — mountain; in Egyptian — desert, since at the edge of the desert above the Nile are ridges of mountains.) The hot wind blowing from the desert.

Giza (Gizeh)

the village near Cairo, on the west bank of the Nile, where the great pyramids of the kings of the IVth dynasty are, together with the burial ground of the aristocrats and high officials.

Graziani, Rodolfo

real name Marchese di Neghelli; Italian general, viceroy of Abyssinia 1936—1937; commander of the Italian forces in Libya 1940—1941.

H

Harris papyrus

the longest preserved roll, or "book", from antique times (127ft.). It contains a list of all the deeds performed by Ramesse III of the XX dynasty of kings of ancient Egypt (1198—1166 B. C.) "for the glory of God" — and for the power of the priesthood. It is an inventory of the immense gifts (from war booty in Asia) which made the priests of the god Amon so powerful economically and politically that less than a hundred years later they were able to seize the government of the country for themselves.

Hatshepsowet

queen of ancient Egypt (1505—1483 B. C.) of the XVIIIth dynasty, during whose reign the great expedition to Punt (the coast of present-day Somaliland) was undertaken. A report of the expedition, accompanied by bas-reliefs, is carved on the walls of the great temple built by Hatshepsowet near the Valley of the Kings at Deir el Bahri, west of Luxor.

Havara

the name of the village in the Faiyum oasis near which stood the "labyrinth" so much admired by Herodotus, the vast palace of the ancient king of Egypt of the XIIth dynasty, Amenemhet III.

hejira

(Arabic: the breaking of tribal bonds) the name of the Mohammedan era which began with the Prophet's flight from Mecca to Medina. The beginning of the era was not fixed until the reign of Caliph Omar I, and the first day was said to be 15th or 16th July 622 A. D., which of course was not the exact date of Mohammed's flight.

Herodotus

Greek traveller and historian who visited Egypt about 450 B. C. His history of Egypt (in the second book of his History) is full of faults. Herodotus described faithfully what he saw himself, but he could not speak Egyptian and modern research, based on the study of ancient Egyptian antiquities, does not confirm

a great deal of what he was told by Greek settlers in Egypt or by his interpreters. The latest research has however proved him to have been right when he declared that the Egyptians used machines for building the Pyramids.

hic sunt leones

(latin: here there are lions) written in old maps to show unexplored territory.

hieratic characters

from the Greek: priestly. Ancient Egyptian cursive script used for writing on papyrus rolls. When the Greek name for this script was coined the demotic script was also in current use, and the hieratic was reserved for religious writings.

hieroglyphics

from the Greek: holy carved writing. Ancient Egyptian characters which originated over 3,000 years before Christ. They are not only pictorial characters, but contain many phonetic characters forming an alphabet together with a smaller number of characters directly symbolising a conception. In addition most words are accompanied by a character which makes the meaning of the preceding word clearer. The characters were carved in stone and frequently painted. From the simplification of the characters which developed when writing on papyrus became common the hieratic and demotic characters developed.

bypostyle

a pillared hall in the buildings of ancient temples.

I

Imperial Meadow:

an island in the river Vltava in Prague, at the foot of the Vyšehrad hill.

Ismail Pasha

King of Egypt from 1863 to 1879.

J

Jebel

(Arabic) hill, hillock.

Juin, Alphonse

French general, collaborated with the Vichy government and helped Rommel during the second world war. The French imperialists enlisted his help to crush the movement for national liberation in Morocco. As a result of his partial success in this task, he was appointed commander of the French Occupation Forces in Germany in March 1951, and became Eisenhower's deputy in the army of the Atlantic Block.

K

Kasr

(Arabic) castle, palace.

Khafre

the third king of the IVth dynasty who ruled 2723—2563 B. C. His tomb is the second largest of the three pyramids near Giza; previously 143.5 metres high, today it is only 136.4. By the temple attached to this pyramid stands a giant statue representing the king in the shape of a lion with a human head — a sphinx.

khamsin

(Arabic: fifty) the name of a sand-storm which is said to last fifty days.

khauli

a shawl formed by a long strip of rough woolen cloth, worn by the women of Tripolitania.

khor

(Arabic) river mouth or estuary; sandy bed of a dried-up stream.

Khufu

the second king of the IVth dynasty; his pyramid is the highest of the three at Giza; formerly 146.6 metres, it is now 137.2.

kommt gar nicht in Frage, jede Menge, die ich will

(German) "The question doesn't arise; as much as I like."

Krkonoše Mountains:

range on the northern borders of Czechoslovakia, (German: Riesen Gebirge, Giant Mountains).

L

Lesseps, Ferdinand (1805—1894)

builder of the Suez Canal (1859—1869). After his failure to build the Panama Canal in 1889 he was sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

Louis XIV

King of France, known as the "Great" or "Sun King". (1661—1715).

Luxor

European form of Arabic El Uksur; Egyptian town built almost exactly on the site of the ancient town of Veset (Greek Thebes), the capital of the New Empire in Ancient Egypt (1580—1085 B. C.). The great temple was dedicated to three gods, Amenrè, Mut, and their son Khonsu. Near by is the village of Karnak, which gives its name to the vast complex of temples of which the biggest is the Temple of Amon dating from the New Empire, with additions from a later age.

M

maghrub

the fifth (evening) prayer established by Islam, performed at eight in the evening.

el Mabarraka

a village on the Nile in northern Sudan; not far away is an ancient Egyptian temple and the ruins of a city which from Ptolemaic times stood on the southern frontiers of Egypt.

mameluke

(Arabic: white slave) In Egypt during the Middle Ages slaves were used to form the Sultan's personal bodyguard and the core of the army. At the time when the French King Saint Louis was defeated in Egypt, the mamlukes revolted and deposed the Sultan; their commander Bibars founded a new dynasty (1250—1382). A second mamluke dynasty, this time of Circassian origin, ruled from 1382 until Egypt fell into the hands of the Turks (1517).

Marcus Aurelius

Emperor of Rome (161—180) and a stoic philosopher, author of the "Thoughts" addressed "To Myself", written in Greek.

Mare Nostrum

(Latin) "Our sea", the name given to the Mediterranean at the height of the power of the Roman Empire.

Marchand, J. B.

French explorer and army officer. He crossed the continent of Africa from the Atlantic to the Red Sea; on this expedition, which besides scientific interests served military and political aims, he came into conflict with British imperial interests at Fashoda in 1898, and was forced to retreat.

Mariette, Auguste (1821—1881)

French egyptologist who directed the excavations financed by the Egyptian government. He discovered Serapeum, founded the greatest museum of ancient Egyptian antiquities (today in Cairo) and brought many discoveries to the public notice.

mastaba

(Arabic: bench) ancient Egyptian graves with flat tops; at the time the Pyramids were built the aristocrats and officials of the court were buried in mastabas.

mahshi

(Arabic) popular form of *emshi*, imperative of the verb "to go".

Mohammed Ali Pasha

viceroy of Egypt from 1769—1849; his successful campaigns against Arabia and the Sudan made him so powerful that he became an independent ruler and founded a dynasty. He took many Europeans into his employment and thus enabled them later on to intervene in the economic and political affairs of Egypt.

Meidum

village south of Cairo, on the west bank of the Nile, site of one of the three pyramids built by Snofrev (c. 2723 B. C.) founder of the IVth dynasty. Now the walls have fallen away and the outer layers subsided or not been finished, the pyramid looks like a four-sided building with towers. When finished it was probably pyramid-shaped.

Memphis

the Greek form of the ancient Egyptian town of the name of Menopher, south of present-day Cairo, which was the capital city of the rulers of the Ancient Empire from 2778—2242 B. C. On the west bank of the Nile, opposite Menopher, was the burial ground on the site of present-day Giza, Abusir, Sakkara, Lisht and Meidum. The town was founded by King Menes.

Memnon

in Greek mythology, the son of the goddess Eos and the hero Tithon.

Mena House

a modern hotel in Giza, near Cairo, called after the founder of the Ist dynasty of kings of ancient Egypt, Menes.

Menes

according to the version of the Egyptian historian, Manethon, who wrote in Greek, the first king to unite Lower and Upper Egypt; identical with Narmer, who is shown on Egyptian antiquities.

Menkaure

fourth king of the IVth dynasty; his is the third and smallest of the pyramids at Giza.

min bena ugrus

(Arabic) "Seize the oar, onward, be strong!"

Mokattam

range of hills on the eastern bank of the Nile, where stone for the building of the pyramids was quarried.

mudir

governor of one of the fourteen provinces of Egypt (*mudiriya*).

Mut

goddess of ancient Egypt, worshipped in Veset (Thebes) as the wife of Amenrè.

N

Neko

second king of the XXVIth dynasty, who tried to revive Egyptian rule in Asia. Under his government (609—594 B. C.) the canal built under the New Empire to connect the eastern part of the Nile delta with the Red Sea was restored. This canal was again restored

the river Vltava; it is part of the longer work, "My Country".

I'olpi, Giuseppe

Italian statesman, governor of Tripolitania 1921—1925, and later minister of finance under Mussolini. For the "pacification" of Tripolitania granted the title of "Count of Misurata".

Vyšehrad

an eminence above the river Vltava, in Prague, the first fortified settlement established by the Czech tribe on the site of the future capital city. Legend has it that from this hill the princess Libuše uttered her famous prophecy of the rise of Prague.

W

wadi

(Arabic: valley) a dried-up water-course which fills with water during the rainy season. Usually without an exit for the water, which sinks away into the sand in the course of time.

Wafd

(Arabic: delegation) Egyptian nationalist party founded by Saad Zaglul Pasha and called after the Egyptian government delegat-

ion which carried on negotiations in London in 1921 for the complete independence of Egypt. After the death of Zaglul the leadership of the party was taken over by Mustapha Nahas Pasha.

Y

yalla emshi

Egyptian dialect phrase: "For God's sake go away."

yasidi

(Arabic) "Sir!"

Z

Zavīyet el Aryan

a village south of Giza, near Cairo, where there are the remains of an unfinished pyramid from about 2880 B. C.

zona proibita

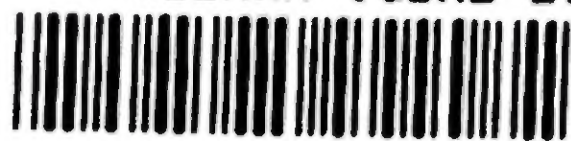
(Italian) forbidden zone.

Zoser

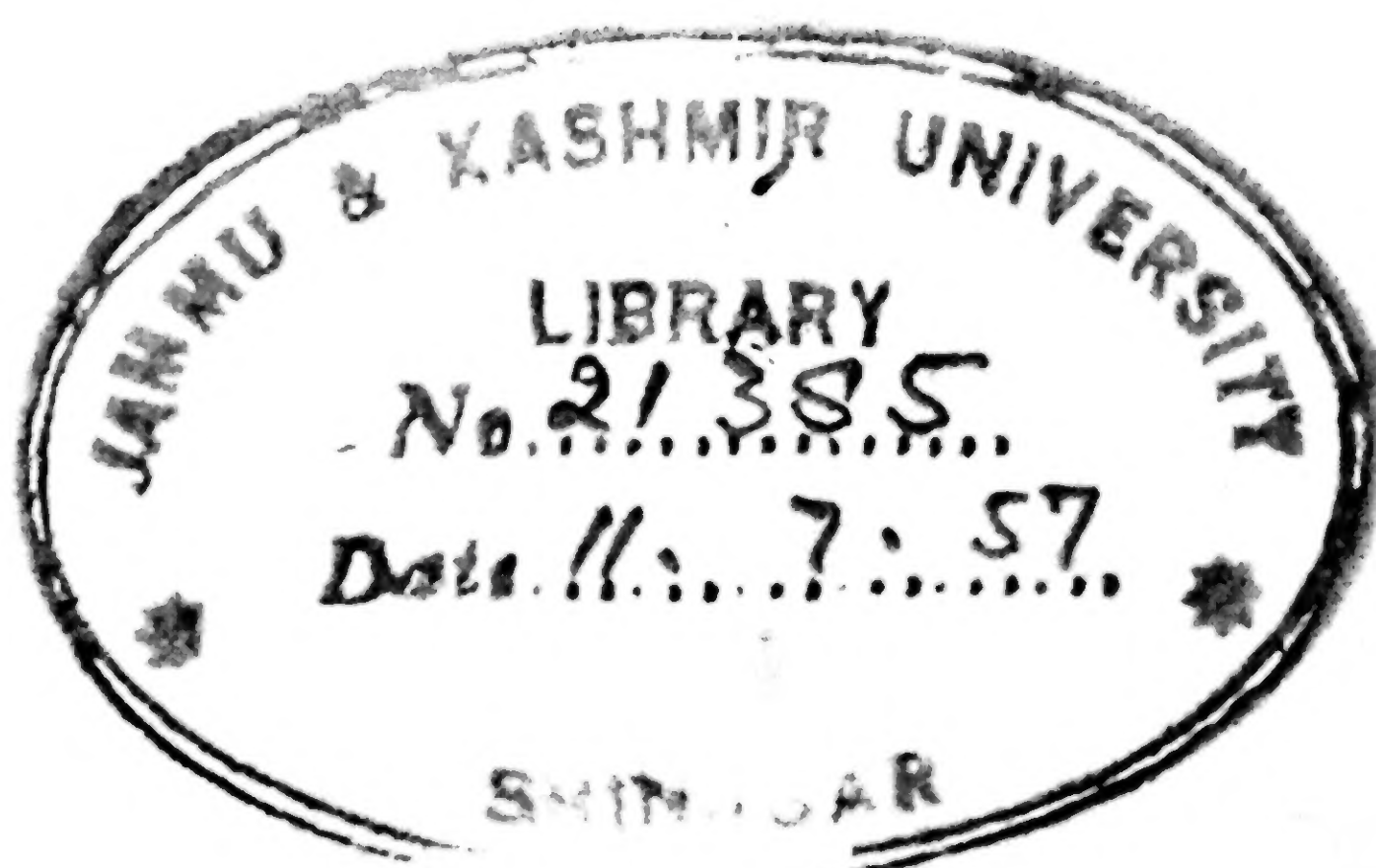
according to contemporary references, Netercheret, the first king of the IIIrd dynasty (c. 2780 B. C.) whose pyramid, the "step" pyramid, is the first to be built of stone.

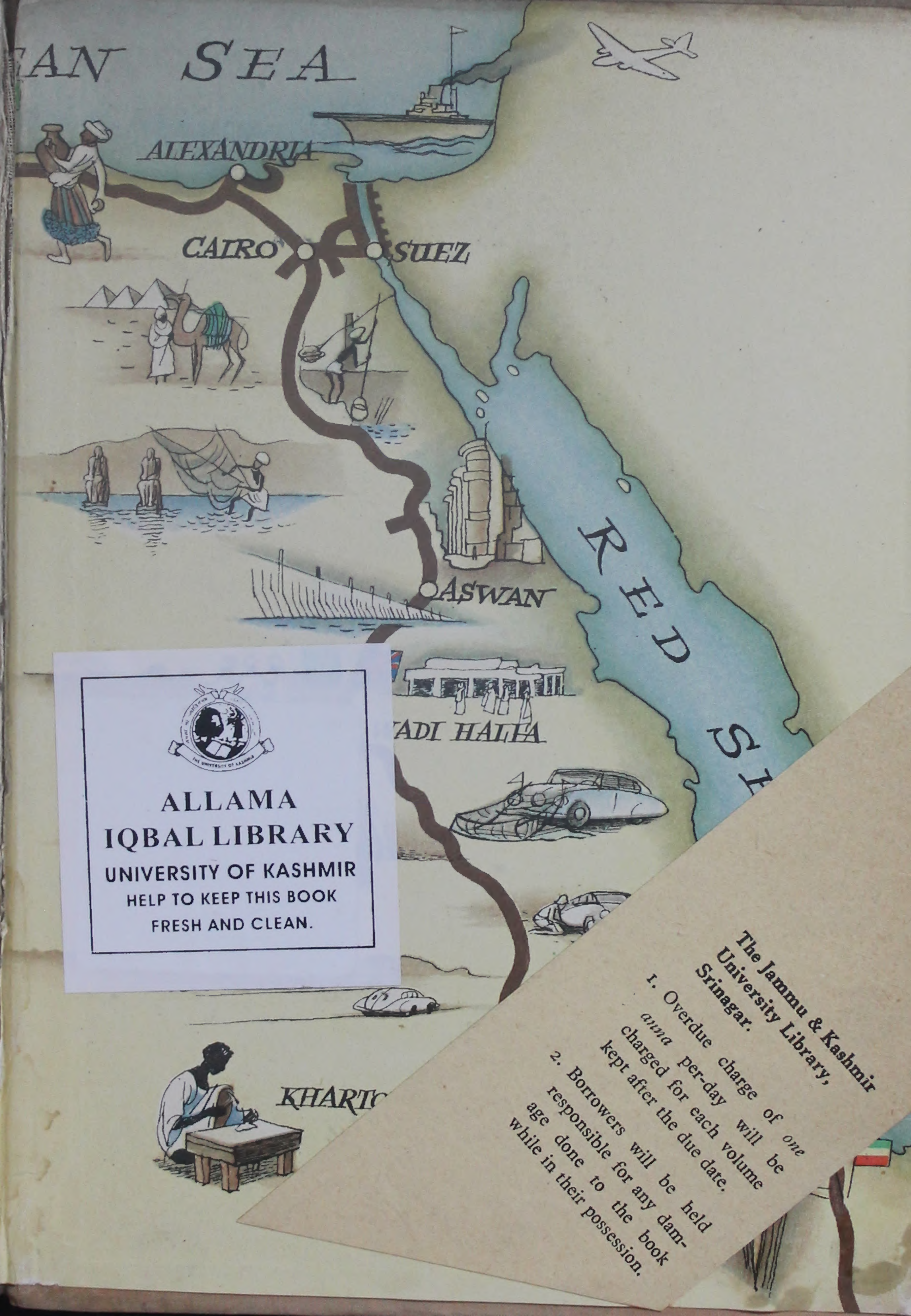


ALLAMA IQBAL LIBRARY



21385





MEDITERRANEAN SEA

ALEXANDRIA

CAIRO

SUEZ

ASWAN

ISRAELI HALFA

RED SEA

KHARTOUM



ALLAMA
IQBAL LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF KASHMIR
HELP TO KEEP THIS BOOK
FRESH AND CLEAN.

The Jammu & Kashmir
University Library,
Srinagar.

1. Overdue charge of *one anna* per-day will be charged for each volume kept after the due date.
2. Borrowers will be held responsible for any damage done to the book while in their possession.